

St Albans Tutors

69 London Road, St Albans, AL1 1LN

Inspection dates	11–13 March 2014	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- Students achieve well in both GCSE and A levels. Last year, all 28 students in the upper sixth achieved a university place.
- The proprietor (who is also the principal) and co-principal are ambitious for students' outcomes. Since the previous inspection, they have ensured that high standards have been maintained and improved the school further. They regularly seek external professional advice to support this process.
- The curriculum is extremely flexible. It allows students to choose from a very wide range of subjects, examination boards and course-lengths to suit their particular needs.
- St Albans Tutors offers each student a high level of individual support for their personal development and academic achievement. Students are very pleased with the support and education provided.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding and the school is a safe, happy place. Students are very motivated to learn and enjoy the high-level work that is expected of them.

It is not yet outstanding because

- The effectiveness of policies and procedures, and the quality of teaching and provision, are not systematically checked.
- Curriculum planning for areas of learning that do not lead to examinations does not always indicate clearly enough what students are expected to learn over the course.
- Not all staff follow the school's guidance on expectations for their teaching.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school requires improvement and must take action to meet schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Seven lessons, taught by seven different teachers, were observed jointly with the co-principal.
- Discussions were held with the principal, co-principal and members of staff.
- Parents' and students' views were gathered through school surveys and informal discussions. There were too few responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents and carers, to be shown. Fourteen completed staff inspection questionnaires were also taken into account.
- Students' work and a wide range of school policies and documents were reviewed.

Inspection team

Judith Charlesworth, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Albans Tutors Independent Sixth Form College (St Albans Tutors) provides GCSE and A-level courses. All places are funded by students' parents.
- The school is registered for students aged 14 to 19 years. There are currently 56 students on roll aged between 15 and 19 years.
- Most students are over 16 years of age, and are studying A levels on a part-time basis. These are provided as two-year, one-year, AS, A2 and retake courses.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 study GCSE courses, together with some additional subjects, full time over one or two years.
- A few students have additional needs, such as medical, emotional or educational, but none has a statement of special educational needs.
- St Albans Tutors aims to support, motivate and promote students' personal development so that they achieve their academic potential and, ultimately, attend university.
- The school was last inspected in March 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The school must meet the following independent school standard:
 - ensure that the temperature of hot water at the point of use does not pose a scalding risk to users (paragraph 23F(1)(d)).

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Students of all ages and abilities achieve well in both GCSE and A-level courses. Most join St Albans Tutors because, for various reasons, they did not achieve the grades they wanted, were not happy, or were not getting on well enough at their previous schools. Students say that they have achieved much better at St Albans Tutors than they thought they could have due to the 'amazing teachers', small groups and personal attention.

The very small number of students taking GCSEs makes comparison with national information unreliable. Nevertheless, last year about a quarter of the grades achieved by the Year 11 students were A* to B, and three quarters were A* to C. The previous year, over half the grades were A* or A, and most were in the range of A* to C which compares favourably with national figures. Taken individually, students of all abilities and needs achieve well from their starting points in all subjects, including English and mathematics.

Students achieve well in their A-level studies. This is because the teaching is good and their motivation to succeed is very high. Coursework is neat, well presented and well organised, and students clearly benefit from the extra study skills sessions they attend. Over the four types of A level courses studied, nearly half the grades gained last year were A* to B, and three quarters were in the A* to C range. These typical results are better than national averages. Students do particularly well when studying A level re-take courses. Last year all results were within the A* to C range, and two thirds were A* to B which far exceed national results. In 2013, all 28 students in the upper sixth (Year 13) applied for and achieved a university place.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Students' behaviour and personal development are outstanding. This aspect was found to be a strength in the previous inspection. Throughout the school, in class and in their common room students are calm, courteous, friendly and helpful to one another and adults. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent and they participate fully in lessons. They enjoy the adult debate and high-level work that is expected of them. Attendance is good and is above the national average. Instances of bullying, racism, rudeness or challenging behaviour are almost unheard of at St Albans Tutors. Students from different cultural backgrounds mix happily together socially and in class, regardless of their background or the school they attended previously.

St Albans Tutors provides very well for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Some students said that their confidence had been knocked by previous school experiences, and that St Albans Tutors had helped them to regain self-worth and confidence. Staff reinforce this view and say that students blossom and thrive in the supportive atmosphere.

Students have a clear understanding of morality, right and wrong, criminal and civil law, and public institutions and services. These qualities are supported through their studies, for example in sociology, government and politics, and personal, social and health education. A number of students go on to university to study related subjects, such as international relations. Staff ensure that students consider balanced views and have regard for the views of others, even if they do not share them. For example, the current scheme of work for personal, social and health education includes debates on topics such as 'Is it right to test products on animals?' and 'Ukraine and Crimea. Does Russia have a point?' Students understand how they can help those less fortunate than themselves. They have gained the British Red Cross Humanitarian School Award by taking part in five challenges, including humanitarian education and fundraising. Overall, students are very well prepared for the next step in their academic lives and for the opportunities and responsibilities of adult life in a modern, multi-cultural and democratic society.

Quality of teaching**Good**

Teaching is good and as a result, students achieve well. All the independent school standards are met, which is an improvement since the previous inspection. Senior leaders are aware of teachers' strengths and areas for development. They confirm that the characteristics of the most effective teaching observed in the inspection are standard practice at St Albans Tutors. These include teachers' excellent, high-level subject knowledge; very high expectations of students to participate and learn; and an adult atmosphere where students' understanding is continually checked and extended by fast, deep questioning and reference to what they need to do to gain good examination grades. Such teaching motivates students, who participate enthusiastically.

Students show great confidence and put forward ideas and answers that are often original and complex. Several examples of teaching promoting excellent learning were observed. On one occasion in media studies, the energising discussion on techniques used in making television programmes helped a student extend his knowledge about film-making as he learned about 'binary opposition'. On another occasion in mathematics, the teacher taught students how to construct a two-way table from written information, and then set them a very challenging problem which they thoroughly enjoyed. Very good opportunities are provided for students to practise speaking, listening, reading, writing and collaboration in all subjects.

The senior leaders acknowledge that occasionally, teaching is less effective. Examples observed included a lecturing approach with insufficient checks on whether students had understood and learned; on the occasion seen, they had not. On another occasion, the pace was so fast that not all students had got to grips with the task and powered up their laptops before the teacher asked for their answers. Not all teachers follow the school's guidance on what should be included in lessons, such as writing clear learning objectives so that students know exactly what they must learn.

Students' work is frequently assessed. In lessons, this takes place through questioning, checking regularly against the learning objectives and marking of work. Marking does not always tell students in detail how to improve their work or grades, although they are expected to reflect on teachers' comments and note themselves on progress tracker forms how they intend to improve. This is a good idea, but these forms are not always completed. Students take college-wide tests in all subjects every half term, including mock GCSE and A-level examinations. Results are recorded and allow staff to check on students' progress and adjust their programme if necessary. They also provide information for reports, parents' consultation meetings and A-level predictions to supply to universities.

Quality of curriculum**Good**

The curriculum is good. It has improved since the previous inspection when it did not include all the areas of learning for students of compulsory school age. All the independent school standards are now met. Students can study a combination of two-year GCSE and A-level courses as well as intensive one-year programmes. All courses are tailored to suit each individual student.

There are currently 20 GCSE subjects offered at St Albans Tutors. All students study English, mathematics and science, and any others that they want. In addition, students now have regular sports sessions at a local sports centre and a weekly lesson in personal, social and health education. This includes topics in the human and social area of learning, such as human rights and access to water in under-developed countries. Developing key learning skills is also an important part of this subject. The creative and aesthetic area of learning is taught through an Arty Garden project, which combines art and design with aspects of environmental studies. Planning for some of these areas of the curriculum, however, is not detailed enough to show how students will develop their learning and skills.

St Albans Tutors offers a very wide range of A levels, currently in 31 subjects. The utmost flexibility is shown as each student is given a choice of subjects, examination board, and length of time over which to study subjects before sitting the examination. All subjects are appropriately planned and systematically taught. Resources are adequate, and St Albans Tutors makes appropriate arrangements for students to access specialist facilities and resources should this be necessary.

Additional classes are provided in specific study skills, such as how to take notes, revise and organise time and studies. All A-level students receive careers guidance and follow a ten week course on the process of applying to university. They receive personal help and support with all aspects of their application, from choosing a suitable university to writing their personal statement.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

The provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. All the independent school standards are met. Students are well safeguarded and the school has rectified shortcomings identified in the previous inspection. Staff are appropriately trained in child protection and checked to ensure their suitability to work with young people. The school has a good link with the local authority to support the rigour of safeguarding procedures.

Good attention is paid to health and safety, including fire safety. The school uses external specialists to complete regular audits of the school and make suggestions for improvement, which are followed up quickly. St Albans Tutors has all the required policies and procedures, such as those for child protection, behaviour management, first aid, and to identify and eliminate bullying and racism. These are implemented effectively, although some have not been updated in line with the most recent guidance. Risk assessments are made in respect of the building and fire, and of activities that take place in and out of school. Students' attendance in every lesson is recorded in teachers' registers. Attendance and punctuality are regularly recorded on student monitoring forms, along with other aspects of each student's academic and personal development. If necessary, students' attendance and punctuality are closely tracked throughout the day and followed up with parents.

St Albans Tutors rightly prides itself on the amount and success of the personal support it offers students. They each have a personal tutor who monitors their academic progress, welfare and personal development, and meets regularly with them to discuss any issues arising. Many students said that this was of real importance to them, for example, that they received 'amazing individual support' and that it was 'hugely beneficial'

Leadership and management

Good

Leadership and management are good. The proprietor and co-principal, strongly supported by the staff, are clear that they want St Albans Tutors to provide high quality education that paves the way to university. They have successfully established a culture of support, high expectations for academic achievement and effort, but one that is relaxed in other ways; for example, there is no uniform and students are on first-name terms with teachers. This gives students the adult environment that they appreciate, helps them to achieve well and prepares them very well for A levels and university life.

The proprietor is outward-looking and seeks external advice and guidance to help improve the school. Some responsibilities for whole-school administration, such as the system for recording and tracking students' achievement, are now being given to other staff to extend management throughout the school. External bodies have reviewed the school's strategic direction and stakeholders' views, and suggested improvements on the basis of the findings. Most parents' views are strongly supportive of the school. However, while a clear business development plan has been written, there is no written plan that focuses solely on improving the quality of education. Nevertheless, the senior leaders recognise the school's strengths and areas for development, and

have implemented a number of improvements since the previous inspection. These include developing the curriculum for students of compulsory school age and improving teaching. Teachers have been provided with helpful guidance, such as expectations for each lesson and essay marking feedback; implementation of this guidance, though, has not been checked. Additionally, systems for regularly checking the effectiveness of policies and procedures, the quality of provision and students' achievement in order to improve them, have not been established.

All but one of the independent school standards are met in respect of the premises. The school now has a suitable room for sick or injured students, which it did not have at the time of the previous inspection. However, the temperature of the hot water is not regulated at the hand basins, which poses a scalding risk. All the standards for the provision of information and the handling of complaints are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	134087
Inspection number	441442
DfE registration number	919/6243
Type of school	Tutorial college
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	56
Number of part time pupils	49
Proprietor	Assim Jemal
Headteacher	Assim Jemal
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 March 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,900–£4,800
Telephone number	01727 842348
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