

Inspection of St Albans Independent College

69 London Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 1LN

Inspection dates:

15 to 17 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St Albans Independent College value the supportive ethos of the school. They feel well supported with their mental health and well-being.

Many pupils have missed significant parts of their education before coming here. They say that the kindness and care of staff help them to re-engage with learning. Pupils are happy. However, the systems leaders use to ensure that pupils are safe are weak and ineffective.

Pupils behave well. They take pride in their work. Pupils are polite and friendly with adults. They respect each other. There is very little bullying or unkindness towards each other. Pupils are proactive in resolving issues among themselves. If staff need to deal with any relationship issues, pupils say they do this well.

In many cases, pupils do well. However, some pupils do not make the progress they should. This is because leaders do not have high enough expectations of what all pupils can learn. The curriculum pupils learn is sometimes narrow and limited. A significant proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not get as much help with their literacy as they should.

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

Leaders' systems are not helping them to check what is working and what is not. For example, they do not log all behaviour incidents in a consistent way. This means leaders do not know which individuals or groups of pupils are causing concern. Leaders therefore do not have a clear picture of issues that build up over time.

Leaders do not have a precise overview of attendance. They do not fulfil their legal obligations in recording attendance. Leaders do not know enough about whether attendance is improving or if their actions to improve it are working. As a result, they do not have all the information they need to ensure that pupils attend school and to keep pupils safe.

Leaders do not have a strategic view of the whole curriculum. This includes for the sixth form. Leaders do not plan effectively how learning builds from key stage 4 to 5. They leave it to teachers to design the curriculum in each subject separately. In some subjects, teachers make sure that pupils develop deep knowledge, such as about the local area in geography. In other areas, however, pupils only study what they need for their exams and do not have access to a broad and balanced curriculum.

Many teachers are knowledgeable about their individual subject specialisms. In some lessons, they check learning well and do not move onto new content until pupils' understanding is secure. Where the quality of education is best, teachers accurately identify what pupils need to learn both to rectify gaps and build up knowledge towards examinations. For instance, in biology, pupils learn the

grammatical and mathematical knowledge they need to be successful in the A level. As a result, pupils mostly build up their knowledge over time to achieve the grades they need for their next stage of education. However, this is not consistent throughout the school.

Where teachers are skilful, they use effective strategies to support the learning of pupils with SEND. Pupils receive high levels of personal support, which builds their confidence. However, in some instances, leaders do not identify the needs of pupils accurately enough. Leaders do not give teachers clear information about how to support pupils with SEND. In key stage 4, pupils with SEND do not get sufficient help to improve their knowledge and skills in learning to read fluently and accurately. Consequently, on occasions, pupils with SEND lack the support they need and do not achieve as well as they could.

Leaders ensure that there is no disruption to lessons. They create a nurturing atmosphere that helps pupils feel calm. Many pupils have social and emotional needs. Leaders ensure that there is carefully thought-through support for these pupils to ensure that they can concentrate on their learning.

Leaders provide a range of opportunities to promote personal development. Pupils have the chance to develop their own characters through, for example, volunteering for charity events. They learn to have a balanced understanding of current affairs. Through the debating club, pupils develop considered views on difference. However, leaders have not fulfilled their statutory duty to consult parents over the relationships and sex education policy.

Pupils receive guidance about what they might do next. In the sixth form, pupils get helpful advice about applying to universities. Leaders make sure that pupils are aware of and explore alternative options and have the chance to meet a range of employers so that they can make an informed decision.

Leaders engage well with the community. They work closely with a local university. Parents are positive about the work of the school.

Staff feel well supported in their well-being. They say that leaders consider their workload and are mindful of their professional development.

The proprietor is also the headteacher. To ensure that the school's leadership gets oversight and scrutiny, the proprietor engages with external consultants. However, this process has not led to effective support and challenge of leaders' work, for example on safeguarding or the quality of the curriculum. Furthermore, it has not ensured that leaders meet their statutory obligations.

Leaders have not ensured that the school consistently meets the independent school standards. Leaders do not know the standards well enough. They do not have a rigorous approach towards consistently meeting them. This was a weakness from the previous inspection that has not improved. Not all information that should be is in place for parents. Leaders do not have all the expected policies in place. Health

and safety is not thorough because leaders do not have sufficient, appropriate, risk assessments. There is not a suitable room to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders' procedures for safeguarding pupils are weak. Staff are poorly trained in how to keep pupils safe. Staff do not know who the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is. There is no clear mechanism for staff to report concerns. Staff are not sure which concerns should be reported to the DSL. Leaders do not keep thorough safeguarding records. As a result of these weaknesses, leaders lack the information they need to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

There is a nurturing culture in the school. Staff have positive relationships with young people. This helps pupils feel safe and well cared for.

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

- Leaders' procedures for safeguarding are weak. As a result, leaders are not able to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Leaders must, as a matter of urgency, rectify these weaknesses and implement much more rigorous safeguarding processes so that these support the needs of pupils and pupils are safeguarded effectively.
- Leaders do not have a clear oversight of the curriculum, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding processes in the school. Because of this, they do not know enough about the impact of their actions. Leaders must make sure that they have all the information they need to ensure that the school improves.
- Leaders do not have a well-considered curriculum design and intention for what pupils will learn. They delegate the planning of this to individual teachers. Consequently, in some areas planning is weak, the curriculum is narrow, and pupils do not acquire the knowledge needed to achieve well. Leaders must make sure that they have a broad and ambitious plan for the curriculum across all year groups and in all subject areas.
- The identification and support of the literacy needs of some pupils with SEND is not strong enough. Some pupils in key stage 4 do not make the progress they should with their reading and writing. Leaders must ensure that they identify the needs of pupils with SEND accurately and put in place the support they need so that pupils learn to read fluently.
- Leaders do not know the independent school standards well, and do not have a rigorous approach to ensuring that they are met. Standards in a range of areas of the school's provision are not met. Leaders must ensure that they know the standards well and make sure that these are met consistently.

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.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	134087
DfE registration number	919/6243
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10210112
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	71
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	48
Number of part-time pupils	5
Proprietor	Assim Jemal
Chair	n/a
Headteacher	Assim Jemal
Annual fees (day pupils)	From £1,500 to £20,298
Telephone number	01727 842348
Website	stalbanscollege.co.uk
Email address	office@stalbanscollege.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	16 to 18 May 2017

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.
- They majority of pupils are in key stage 5 and study A levels. These are provided as two-year, one-year, AS, A2 and retake courses.
- In key stage 4, pupils study GCSE courses full time over two years.
- Pupils learn in small classes of between one and seven pupils.
- More than half the pupils in the college have SEND.
- 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.

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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the principal, and two assistant principals. The co-principal was not in school at the time of the inspection.
- Inspectors met with teachers, staff and pupils.
- To evaluate the quality of education, inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science and geography. These included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work, checking curriculum documentation, and talking to staff and pupils.
- Inspectors also spoke to teachers about some other subjects, notably personal, social and health education, film studies, media studies, politics and classics.
- Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead and principal to discuss their work to safeguard pupils. Inspectors also scrutinised records, policies and procedures relating to safeguarding and pupils' welfare and well-being.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of policies, documents and records, including those for attendance and behaviour.

- Inspectors considered the 11 responses to the online parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the 10 free-text comments submitted during the inspection. Inspectors considered the 12 responses to the staff survey, and the 12 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Charlie Fordham, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Wendy Varney

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work–
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor–
 - 2A(1)(d) in making arrangements for the purposes of paragraphs (a), (b) or (c), has regard to any guidance under section 80A of the Education Act 2002 that applies in relation to the provision of education by maintained schools,
 - 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e).
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that–
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively; and

- 9(c) a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour.
- 15 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006[13].
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 24(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable accommodation is provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils, including–
 - 24(1)(b) accommodation for the short term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 32(1)(b) the information specified in sub-paragraph (3) is made available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate.
- 32(3) The information specified in this sub-paragraph is–
 - 32(3)(a) particulars of the school’s policy on and arrangements for admissions, misbehaviour and exclusions;
 - 32(3)(b) particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with EHC plans and pupils for whom English is an additional language.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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