



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**ST ALBANS HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**

**INTERIM INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## St Albans High School for Girls

Full Name of School	<b>St Albans High School for Girls</b>		
DfE Number	<b>919/6038</b>		
Registered Charity Number	<b>311065</b>		
Address	<b>St Albans High School for Girls 1-3 Townsend Avenue St Albans Hertfordshire AL1 3SJ</b>		
Telephone Number	<b>01727 853 800</b>		
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Email Address	<b>info@stalbans-high.herts.sch.uk</b>		
Head	<b>Mrs R Martin</b>		
Chair of Governors	<b>Mrs J Boulton</b>		
Age Range	<b>4 to 18</b>		
Total Number of Pupils	<b>933</b>		
Gender of Pupils	<b>Girls</b>		
Numbers by Age	3-5 (EYFS):	<b>39</b>	5-11: <b>267</b>
	11-18:	<b>627</b>	
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	<b>933</b>	
Head of EYFS Setting	<b>Mrs C Sykes</b>		
EYFS Gender	<b>Girls</b>		
Inspection dates	<b>30 Nov 2010 to 01 Dec 2010</b>		

## PREFACE

This report is according to the *Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) schedule for INTERIM inspections*. The inspection is a two-day visit with a focus on compliance with regulatory requirements. ISI inspections occur every three years and have two formats, interim and standard, which usually occur in an alternating pattern. The school's next inspection will therefore follow the standard schedule, which includes two visits totalling five days and places greater emphasis on the quality of education and care in addition to reporting on regulatory compliance. The school's previous inspection was in October 2006.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010\*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

\*These Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31<sup>st</sup> August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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## **1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

- 1.1 St Albans High School, founded in 1889, is a Church of England day school for 933 girls aged from four to eighteen, of whom 153 are in the sixth form. It consists of a senior school located in the original buildings close to the centre of St Albans and a preparatory school, Wheathampstead House, which includes the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), consisting of 39 pupils, housed in buildings approximately five miles away from St Albans in the village of Wheathampstead. A new purpose-built sports pavilion on the senior school site is currently under construction and is due for completion in early 2011. The governing body has oversight of all sections of the school.
- 1.2 The school's main aims are to give all pupils the stimulus and encouragement to develop their academic abilities, a wide range of interests and a sense of personal values and to make education a challenging and positive experience in which each girl can feel some measure of success and acquire confidence and self-esteem. It seeks to do so through high standards of education and care, a wide curriculum, developing pupils' social awareness and sense of responsibility, responding to educational initiatives, and constant review and improvement of school facilities. Since the last inspection in October 2006, a new chair of governors, headmistress, and head of the preparatory school have been appointed.
- 1.3 The ability profile of the school is above the national average, with many pupils far above the national average. With very few exceptions, pupils from the preparatory school progress to the senior school and sixth-form leavers proceed to higher education. Pupils come from a range of backgrounds and girls of all religious denominations, nationalities and faiths are admitted. The school has identified 61 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) and no pupils receive support for their English.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

## 2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

### **The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills**

- 2.1 From the EYFS onwards, the high standards achieved by pupils of all abilities at the time of the previous inspection have been fully maintained in accordance with the school's aims. Throughout the school the pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. They are purposeful, comfortable working individually or in a group and extremely enthusiastic, with high levels of concentration and self-motivation. Highly articulate, they are keen to express their opinions and debate arguments with feeling. They are focused in lessons and are very ambitious. The volume of work produced is considerable, demonstrating excellent progress. They use information and communications technology skills confidently. In the preparatory school, pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance in national tests but, on the evidence available, it is judged to be far above in relation to national age-related expectations. Results at GCSE and A Level have been far above the national average for girls in maintained schools, and above the national average for girls in maintained selective schools. Pupils of all ages make excellent progress in relation to their already high abilities. High achievement in areas of creativity and aesthetic learning can be seen through their success in local and national competitions. Outstanding results are seen in all extra-curricular activities, especially in the music and drama performances and examination results. Many pupils enjoy significant individual and team success in both county and national sports.
- 2.2 The curriculum makes an excellent contribution to the pupils' achievements and progress, and is well planned to ensure continuity of education. It is stimulating and challenging, with an extensive and varied range of subjects covering the required areas of learning, and is very successful in fulfilling the school's aim to offer each pupil the opportunity to develop their personal interests and extend their knowledge and sense of achievement. In the senior school, the programme for personal, social, health, citizenship and economic education (PSHCEE) is taught effectively both in specific lessons and in tutor time. In the preparatory school, PSHCEE is based around a programme which promotes a strong sense of community responsibility.
- 2.3 There is an excellent range of extra-curricular activities during lunchtimes and after school. These are regarded by pupils as an important complement to the curriculum which supports their academic, musical, creative and sporting interests, giving them the chance to continue to develop their skills and talents. Music and drama are popular, well-supported activities with challenging repertoires. Since the last inspection the level of monitoring of pupil participation has improved. A large number of pupils successfully take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and pupils enjoy the wide variety of sports available, competing in a large number of fixtures.
- 2.4 In the majority of the lessons observed during the inspection, across all ages, the teaching was excellent, fulfilling the school's aim to make education challenging and encourage the achievement of the highest academic standards and individual potential. In the very best lessons, interesting and highly stimulating teaching enabled the pupils to acquire new knowledge, make outstanding progress, increase their understanding and develop skills associated with independent learning and thinking. Pupils have a strong respect for their teachers, listen well and are supportive of one another's views. Pupils with LDD are supported effectively,

enabling them to achieve as well as their peers in relation to their ability. There is also excellent provision for the most able, gifted and talented, and the teaching strategies employed cascade naturally into most academic lessons. Marking and assessment in the senior school are generally of high quality in all departments, with the best examples revealing detailed comments which allow the pupils to consolidate their work and make good progress. On a very few occasions, there were examples of marking being perfunctory and void of important feedback, but pupils commented that oral feedback in lessons was always very effective. In the preparatory school assessment is of a high quality, although correction work from pupils is not always rigorously pursued.

### **The quality of the pupils' personal development**

- 2.5 The quality of the pupils' personal and social development from the EYFS upwards is outstanding and, as at the time of the last inspection, is a real strength of the school. The strong Christian ethos allows pupils to grow and flourish into self-assured young people who have a strong sense of who they are and what they believe in. All pupils are encouraged to develop their own personality or character and to tolerate the values and beliefs of others. Pupils throughout the whole school show a clear understanding of the positive values of good conduct. Through discussions with pupils it was clear that they had a natural sense of right and wrong and appreciated the sense of fairness. Pupils are friendly and they enjoy excellent relationships, both with one another and with their teachers. Their spiritual development is enhanced through art displays, musical performance, assemblies and discussions in lessons. There are numerous opportunities for teamwork and leadership through the house systems, senior school council and preparatory school committee. Pupils are encouraged to show initiative and are keen to contribute to community life, both within and outside school. Opportunities to understand their own and other cultures are developed in lessons and assemblies, and through trips, visits and overseas exchanges.
- 2.6 Pastoral arrangements are excellent and much valued by pupils and parents. These remain strengths of the school. Since the last inspection the role of the tutor has been redefined in the senior school and the tutor time programme developed in line with the recommendation made. Pupils in the preparatory school are extremely well looked after by a very strong pastoral care system. They are very happy and comfortable in their school environment, and find all staff approachable, caring and dedicated to their needs. Teachers work extremely hard and know the pupils very well. In the senior school each pupil is encouraged to talk to the person they feel most confident with, ranging from the form tutor to the housemistress or the school nurse. The pupils' questionnaire showed overwhelmingly that they liked being in the school; however, a small number of pupils raised a concern that the teachers did not always monitor the pupils' work load. Most of these issues were centred on homework and extra-curricular commitments, but inspection evidence does not suggest that this was a significant problem. In interviews with pupils an appreciation was expressed for the extra help, advice and support given by all teachers.
- 2.7 The safety and welfare of the pupils are given the highest priority. Excellent policies and procedures that are clear and effective safeguard and promote the welfare of the pupils. All staff, including ancillary staff and governors, have participated in recent safeguarding training, including training in safer recruitment and internet safety. Arrangements to ensure health and safety are very effective. Detailed risk assessments are adhered to and these are regularly reviewed. All necessary measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards have been taken, and the

required fire prevention procedures are well known. School fire drills are carried out regularly and the electrical safety of appliances is checked. Admission registers are kept meticulously, the electronic registration system is efficient and absences are followed up swiftly. The school is assiduous in ensuring that all the required checks to ensure the suitability of adults to work with children are undertaken.

### **The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management**

- 2.8 The governing body has an excellent insight into the working of the school, and the chair of governors is frequently in school liaising closely with the headmistress. Governors offer an excellent breadth of experience, knowledge and interest, which contributes significantly to the strategic planning for the school's future development. The governing body is most effective in discharging its responsibilities for standards, child protection, welfare, and health and safety throughout the school. All of the required policies are regularly implemented and reviewed.
- 2.9 The school benefits from very strong, positive leadership and management, and those with management responsibilities carry out their tasks extremely efficiently and competently. The school has responded well to the recommendations of the previous report but is aware that it cannot become complacent and remains committed to pursuing further ways to improve the educational experience of the pupils. Links between the two parts of the school have improved significantly since the last inspection. Senior leaders identify the needs of the school with insight. Good policies are introduced at all levels, implemented successfully, and monitored well in nearly all areas. An appropriate system of staff review exists for teaching and non-teaching staff, leading to regular training, well designed to address the school's needs.
- 2.10 Links between the school and parents are excellent. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire show that parents are overwhelmingly pleased with the education and support provided. They receive regular and detailed information about their children's progress in well-presented written reports which indicate current attainment and contain advice on how their daughter may improve her performance. There are also progress meetings for parents. Some parents felt that they had little opportunity to become involved in the life of the school but regular newsletters, the school magazine and individual letters inform parents of forthcoming events and how they might become involved. The detailed complaints procedure is available through the website and in hard copy. There have been no formal complaints in the last twelve months.

### **3. ACTION POINTS**

#### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 3.1 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

#### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

- 3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Continue to provide the highest possible challenge and the widest opportunities for all.
2. Continue to raise the standards of excellent practice in assessments to all subjects.
3. Further develop the potential of outdoor learning opportunities to further enhance the EYFS curriculum.
4. Strive to maintain the highest standards of teaching and learning already provided by the EYFS setting.

#### **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE**

##### **4.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

4.1 Overall the setting is outstanding and successfully achieves its aim to provide an academic education and prepare girls for the challenges of the 21st century. It provides a stimulating and positive experience in which every child can achieve and acquire confidence and self-esteem. Children's needs are exceptionally well met through a broad range of activities. Highly effective self-review ensures that the setting continues to provide experiences that broaden, enrich and extend the skills and talents of every child. High expectations, excellent relationships and well-informed understanding of young children enable significant progress. All adults are committed to sustaining high standards and to continuous improvement.

##### **4.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

4.2 Leadership and management are outstanding. A clear vision is integral to the overall development of the school. The dedicated management team has high aspirations for quality through ongoing improvement and a strong commitment to the welfare of the individual, whether child or adult. Self-evaluation is effective in identifying strengths and areas for development. Contributions from parents, staff and governors provide clear direction with a strong focus on achievement and being part of a caring community. Parents are very happy with the provision and actively support the school. They are very well informed about their children's progress and are given clear information about the learning environment. All records, policies and procedures necessary for the professional management of the setting are in place and implemented rigorously. Children use a wide range of high quality resources most effectively to reflect excellent teaching and learning. The extensive outdoor environment supports and broadens their educational experience and has the potential to provide further stimulating learning opportunities.

##### **4.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

4.3 Provision is outstanding, reflecting a clear understanding of the EYFS requirements in outstanding classroom practice, where all children learn and develop extremely well. Adults ensure that all children, whatever their individual needs, are able to thrive and succeed. Careful observations are made which record children's learning; information from assessment procedures is used by teachers to give an overview of progress that guides future teaching. Teaching has clear learning objectives and closely engages children in carefully considered and well-balanced teacher-led and child-initiated activities. Detailed planning enables children to learn and develop skills through first-hand experiences specifically aimed to focus on their interests and needs, leading them to explore and play imaginatively, to demonstrate their creativity and to make suggestions and offer ideas. Excellent, comprehensive arrangements for risk assessment and safeguarding are in place and all staff are suitably trained. Children's welfare has a high profile and their emotional and social needs are well supported by key adults, who provide safe, clear routines and high quality learning experiences.

#### **4.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

- 4.4 Children make outstanding progress in relation to their individual starting points and to the early learning goals in all areas of the curriculum. They enjoy their lessons and their experience of school life as a whole. Children are inquisitive, enthusiastic, active learners who demonstrate high levels of independence, imagination and concentration. They relate well to adults in the setting. Behaviour is exemplary and reflects the school culture of mutual respect and co-operation. The children understand safety and hazards, the importance of personal hygiene and the need for a healthy lifestyle. They are energetic and enjoy being active.

**Section 3 includes what the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve its provision.**

## **INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

The inspectors observed a small sample of lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors and a governors' representative, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited facilities for sick and injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Dr Stuart Nuttall

Reporting Inspector

Miss Mary Burridge

Assistant Reporting Inspector

Mr William Burn

Second Master, HMC school

Mrs Janet Cooper

Former Head, IAPS school

Mrs Catherine Lane

Early Years Co-ordinating Inspector