



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

ST ALBANS HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

DECEMBER 2016



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	St Albans High School for Girls			
DfE number	919/6038			
Registered charity number	311065			
Address	St Albans High School for Girls 1-3 Townsend Avenue St Albans Hertfordshire AL1 3SJ			
Telephone number	01727 853800			
Email address	info@stahs.org.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Jenny Brown			
Chair of governors	Ms Dorothy Henderson			
Age range	4 to 18			
Number of girls	983			
	Boys	0	Girls	983
	Day girls	983	Boarders	0
	Reception	34	Juniors	268
	Seniors	516	Sixth Form	165
Inspection dates	07 to 08 December 2016			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any unmet standards identified at their previous inspection.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

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

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the girls, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the girls.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and grade descriptors from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for girls and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Maureen Bradley	Reporting inspector
Lady Fiona Mynors	Accompanying inspector
Mrs Anne Jones	Team inspector (Former head, GSA school)
Mr Dougal Philps	Team inspector (Headmaster, IAPS school)
Ms Charlotte Avery	Team inspector (Headmistress, GSA school)
Mr James Sheridan	Team inspector (Headmaster, GSA school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 St Albans High School for Girls is an academically selective, independent day school for girls from 4 to 18 years. The school was founded in 1889 and established on its current site in the heart of St Albans in 1908. The preparatory school moved to the nearby village of Wheathampstead in 2003. The school is a registered charity, taking the form of a company limited by guarantee. The school council is comprised of 19 governors who are directors of the company and trustees of the charity.
- 1.2 The preparatory school accepts children into the Reception class at the age of 4, and they move through the school until they are the age of 11. The majority of girls transfer to the senior school at 11 years. A large sixth form plays a defining role in the culture of the school. The school operates a day house structure which is central to the organisation of the pastoral care. Since the previous inspection in November 2010, a new headmistress, preparatory school head and chair of governors have been appointed. The school has built a new science building on the senior site and a new music and performing arts centre on the preparatory school site.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to foster scholarship, adventure and integrity by providing inspirational opportunities and strong support to develop a lifelong love of learning and respect for others. It seeks to offer an education for girls which promotes intellectual confidence and curiosity, and to build an outward looking community through a national and international curriculum. It aims to sustain a community in which every girl feels supported, confident and ready to shape society in a school which builds a strong ethic of service and responsible citizenship.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Girls come from a range of professional and ethnic backgrounds, mostly in Hertfordshire and north London. Standardised tests and data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the girls is above the national average. The school has identified 73 girls as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and some physical difficulties, all of whom receive additional specialist help or support in the classroom. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan or a statement of special educational needs. English is an additional language (EAL) for 131 girls, who do not need any specialist support.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in November 2010. The recommendations from that inspection were:
 - Continue to provide the highest possible challenge and the widest opportunities for all.
 - Continue to raise the standards of excellent practice in assessments to all subjects.
 - Further develop the potential of outdoor learning opportunities to further enhance the EYFS curriculum.
 - Strive to maintain the highest standards of teaching and learning already provided by the EYFS setting.
- 1.7 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspection. Further detail is given in the main text of the report.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Girls throughout the whole school demonstrate excellent levels of skill, knowledge and understanding across all areas of learning and in their extra-curricular activities. The school is successful in fulfilling its aim to provide an education which promotes intellectual confidence, curiosity and a joy of learning.
- Girls of all ages make excellent progress and are encouraged by the scholarship of their teachers and the inspiring and stimulating learning environment provided for them by governors, senior leaders and middle management.
- Girls entering GCSE, IGCSE and A-level examinations achieve exceptional results that are far above the national average for pupils of similar ability. Girls with SEND achieve to the same level as pupils of similar ability.
- Girls of all ages have excellent attitudes to learning and demonstrate high levels of self-esteem and confidence in their learning and activities. A particular strength is their resilient attitude to academic challenge.

2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Girls' personal development is fostered by a multitude of rich and vibrant opportunities provided for them at all ages and excellent pastoral care. The school is successfully developing a community in which every pupil feels supported.
- Girls are mature, self-confident and exhibit high levels of social and cultural awareness. They have strong moral integrity and a thoughtful and sensitive spiritual understanding. They understand the importance of responsibility and service to others.
- Girls are impressively self-disciplined and their personal development is characterised by excellent standards of behaviour and respect for each other and for their teachers.
- Girls of all ages develop excellent skills to prepare themselves for the next stage of their education and to help them make their mark as future leaders in society.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Strengthen the opportunities for girls below the sixth form to experience the challenges of life outside of school.
- In the preparatory school, extend the opportunities for girls to contribute to the development of the school community.

3. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Girls throughout the school achieve at high levels, in accordance with the school's aim to offer an education which promotes intellectual confidence, curiosity and the joy of learning. Almost all parents and girls who answered the pre-inspection questionnaire reported high levels of satisfaction with the education provided.
- 3.3 In the preparatory school, the youngest children in Reception establish solid foundations through a topic-based curriculum in which they fully engage and find challenging and fun. Their early language skills are well-developed and they are confident readers and are able to write short, accurate sentences. The children identify shapes, manipulate numbers up to 20 and use them in their role plays. Through a playful and supportive learning environment, they develop their excellent creativity, fine motor and physical skills, and their understanding of the world around them.
- 3.4 The girls' self-assurance in performance is evident as they progress from Reception to Year 2. They continue to build on core skills and quickly become fluent readers and enthusiastic writers. Girls participate with interest, reading new words and phrases clearly and with confidence. In English, girls are able to use information checklists to keep them focused on the task and to guide them to produce their best work. They can answer progressively difficult questions confidently and at length. Their excellent mental arithmetic skills and high levels of reasoning and problem solving are well developed. They gain a good understanding of the world of science through challenging and playful work, exploring the natural world in their outdoor education.
- 3.5 As girls progress through the preparatory school, they develop excellent levels of knowledge, understanding and skills across their full range of subjects and activities. Girls in the preparatory school are not entered for national curriculum tests, but work completed in the classroom and in books shows their level of attainment and progress to be excellent. They are highly articulate and speak with confidence to each other and to their teachers. Girls understand how to use language appropriate to different situations and develop confidence in foreign languages, including Mandarin. Excellent use of their high-level literacy skills is evident in tasks that are set in persuasive writing which involve rhetorical questions, statistics, technical vocabulary, alliteration, comparatives and superlatives. Open-ended questioning and excellent teaching contribute fully to this. Girls are encouraged 'to have a go', and thinking skills are well developed as questions are never answered without the teacher asking first, 'What do you think?'
- 3.6 Girls' attitudes to mathematics are highly positive and they have outstanding levels of numeracy. They are adept at problem solving and reasoning skills. This was observed in science, for example, when they tried and succeeded in working out how to complete electrical circuits. They feel comfortable and increasingly confident with the use of information and communication technology (ICT), learning coding and creating animations. They are able to research material and present it to others as they become increasingly self-motivated learners. The girls' creative skills are well developed through a curriculum which is rich and varied and includes plenty of time for music, drama and creativity.
- 3.7 Girls' knowledge, understanding and skills in the senior school are notably advanced at every age and across the breadth of the curriculum. Exceptional achievement in literature and languages, humanities, mathematics, sciences and the arts is supported by engaging and dynamic teaching and carefully orchestrated lessons which facilitate rapid progress in learning. Girls' communication skills are particularly advanced. They bring prior knowledge and understanding with them to class and engage fluently, co-operatively and resiliently in oral and written discussion and debate across the full range of subjects and in foreign languages. They use technical vocabulary with ease and are able to deduce meanings of advanced vocabulary through reference to the Latin origins of words. They can articulate and share different ways of planning answers and structure responses to questions

which test their skills of identification and evaluation of ideas. A high level of analytical skill is evident in their notes.

- 3.8 Girls' work displays clear knowledge and understanding in both mathematics and science. They have a good grasp of scientific language and display excellent standards of collaborative practical work. Girls are highly numerate and have the confidence to use mathematical skills naturally as a tool across the subject range. They enjoy problem solving, analysing and hypothesising. Girls have a natural ability with ICT and use those skills confidently to benefit their classwork, independent study, and social and charitable initiatives. They benefit from the oversight of the governors and senior leadership team who have ensured a generous provision of resources and facilities. Girls' study skills are encouraged by the scholarship of their teachers and the passion they show for their subjects, which is generously shared in the classroom environment. The sixth form pupils are encouraged to undertake independent study when, for example, producing an academic journal in geography and researching the cultures of other countries. Leadership skills are promoted through the introduction of intellectual and entertaining activities into the girls' school lives, such as participation in the Young Enterprise and debating competitions. Girls devise and lead a number of clubs and societies in school, and a dynamic group of Year 10 girls recently organised a series of talks aimed at sharing new ideas and interesting discoveries. Girls are inspired by speakers who they frequently invite to the school to challenge prevailing ideas and embrace individuality, or to share their professional experience from the world of work.
- 3.9 Senior girls consistently achieve exceptional examination results, making progress that is excellent in relation to the national average for girls of similar abilities. Results in GCSE, IGCSE and A level examinations between 2013 and 2015 have been far above the national average. Girls with SEND achieve to an excellent level. They benefit from careful screening, excellent learning support and close monitoring of their progress to ensure they maximise their potential. Exceptional levels of attainment are achieved by the most able girls, especially in the sixth form. Girls relish the additional challenges they receive which is a feature of all lessons. Over recent years, 90 per-cent of sixth form girls attended their first choice of university and course.
- 3.10 Throughout the school girls engage and achieve in an excellent range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities to enjoy travel and to visit places of interest. Girls of all ages are highly creative with outstanding ability demonstrated in art, drama and musical performances. High standards of performance are achieved in external music examinations and in diverse choirs, bands, ensembles and orchestras. Music and drama frequently combine to produce outstanding performances such as the recent production of *Oklahoma*. Girls achieve high standards at county, regional and national levels in sporting competitions such as tennis, lacrosse and athletics as a result of a breadth of opportunities and the enthusiasm and skills of the teaching staff. Excellent standards of resilience, independence and perseverance are demonstrated in pupils' attainment of the gold standard in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and in challenging trips, such as trekking in Peru and development work in Nepal.
- 3.11 Girls of all ages have excellent attitudes to learning and demonstrate high levels of self-esteem and confidence in their work and activities. A particular strength is their willingness to work positively together in groups or independently, and to take responsibility for their learning in and out of the classroom. Girls have a notably resilient attitude to academic challenge and do not shy away from discussing what they find difficult. They share their passion for learning with their teachers for whom they have a great respect.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Girls' development is fostered by a highly stimulating and inspiring learning environment that provides a multitude of rich and vibrant opportunities for them at all ages. They feel supported, nurtured and confident and learn how to develop into responsible and caring citizens. In the questionnaires, almost all parents and girls recognised the high quality of pastoral care and support provided by the school and the contribution it made to the girls' personal development.
- 4.3 Girls from Reception through to the sixth form have a good understanding of their own abilities and exhibit high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. Within their first term in Reception, children begin to understand how much they have achieved since they were babies as they learn about themselves through the topic 'All about Me'. They develop their vivid imaginations through role plays and build up valuable social skills as they make friends and learn to share. From an early age they understand the importance of right and wrong through the 'golden rules' that are explored in their learning. Helped by a house buddy, they begin to understand the routines and expectations of school life. Girls in the preparatory school develop their ability to self-reflect as they respond positively to a programme of personal thinking skills. This also helps them to learn the importance of consideration for others, and how to respond to challenging situations with positive attitudes and show appreciation of the wider aspects of life. Girls talked about a recent assembly which had helped them to understand the differences between opinion and fact.
- 4.4 Pupils have a profound spiritual awareness and are sensitive to the non-material aspects of life, as shown by their work outdoors and their appreciation of nature, as well as their exceptional drama, art and music and the quality of their ethical debates. They demonstrate their thoughtfulness in mature classroom discussions, as exemplified by the sixth form pupils who explored the topic of 'wonder' in their 'Perspectives' programme. Girls throughout the preparatory school understand the idea that there is something bigger than themselves and that they should look outwards. They can discuss issues of spirituality maturely. Through a philosophical approach to religious education, girls in Years 8 and 9 showed considerable maturity when debating the different beliefs in the sanctity of life. Their spiritual development is supported by the study of different faiths and participation in Christian and multi-faith services including a Eucharist, carol services and a founder's day service.
- 4.5 As girls mature they exhibit high levels of social awareness and tolerance and have strong moral integrity. They confidently ask for particular topics to be discussed within age-appropriate safe spaces in their personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) lessons. They express appreciation of an innovative programme reflecting current social and political issues and the importance of human rights and charity work. Girls fully engage with issues through their academic curriculum, stimulated by discussions about crime and punishment, citizenship, the British democratic system and the issues associated with immigration. Girls have a strong sense of right and wrong, respect the school's rules and recognise the fairness of any sanction. This is a result of the ethos within the school and the support available to the girls, both within the PSHEE curriculum and from the staff through the strong pastoral system.
- 4.6 Girls are extremely self-disciplined, and their social development is characterised by excellent standards of behaviour and respect for each other and their teachers. From the youngest age, girls collaborate with ease in their lessons and activities whilst recognising that this is a skill that needs to be developed. Young girls are able to make mature and constructive arguments on the positives and negatives of working in groups. In the senior school, girls contribute extremely well to the life of the school through the opportunities they have to undertake varied responsibilities. They enjoy opportunities to work in teams, groups and pairs and to work across different year groups in house events and sporting activities, where they embrace leadership in competition. All girls understand that they are required to take on some responsibility during their time in school. Girls feel fully supported by the excellent relationships they establish with their teachers, who know them

extremely well and support them with any issues or concerns. They demonstrate concern for each other, as demonstrated by the way that older girls support younger ones. Girls below the sixth form, however, do not always have sufficient opportunities to experience challenges and responsibility outside of the school where the learning environment may be less well supported. Although the girls in the preparatory school contribute to school life through the responsibilities they have and the school committee, the other opportunities to contribute to the development of their own school community through sharing their ideas or opinions are limited.

- 4.7 Girls seek new ways in which to participate in and celebrate cultural diversity which is supported by a school culture which implicitly values inclusivity. Their compassion extends beyond school to seek ways to support the needs of the wider society both locally and globally, as demonstrated by their extensive charity work. Girls believe in equality, respect for each other and are interested in the differences found in varied cultural backgrounds. They openly discuss issues within the curriculum and their intelligent, reflective approach to debate ensures that they maintain an international outlook on issues. A recent harvest festival involved volunteers contributing from different cultural backgrounds. The girls throughout the school are knowledgeable about their own culture, especially its history, literature, art, theatre and music. They benefit from many opportunities to visit the theatre, galleries, exhibitions and centres of historical and religious importance to further inform them of the importance of British culture and values.
- 4.8 The girls are fully aware of how to stay healthy and the various factors that will help them to stay safe. Time is available in pastoral discussion and within the curriculum to reinforce these concepts. All participate in discussing health and well-being and the importance of sharing concerns. Girls understand the importance of not keeping secrets, eating nutritious food, e-safety and having a healthy body image. They understand the contribution of exercise to a healthy lifestyle and they are fit and active. Girls of all ages develop excellent skills to prepare them for the next stage of their education and on leaving school are ambitious to make their mark as future leaders in society.