

Inspection of Birmingham Independent College

Albert Hall, Witton Road, Aston, Birmingham, West Midlands B6 5NU

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 October 2024

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

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, including students in the sixth form, at Birmingham Independent College have often experienced several previous school placements before starting here. While the school provides pupils with another chance to succeed in education, it is not keeping its pupils as safe as it should. The curriculum does not teach pupils enough about important issues, such as some of the risks that they might face outside school. While some pupils said that they feel safe and happy at school, several other pupils are unable to communicate how they feel. The school does not have effective systems to develop pupils' ability to communicate their worries or concerns. This puts them at potential risk of harm.

Many pupils arrive disengaged with education. Staff work successfully to re-engage pupils with learning. They support pupils' social and emotional development well by building strong, trusting relationships. As a result, pupils show positive attitudes to their learning and behave well.

The school has high expectations for those pupils who follow the academic pathway. Staff support these pupils well so that they can achieve their targets and progress to the next stage of their education. However, there is an increasing proportion of pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has not provided staff with the training that they need to support these pupils as well as they could. Although staff provide effective support to pupils to gain some level of independence, the curriculum does not enable these pupils to achieve well.

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

The school aims for its pupils to be successful. For some pupils, including some students in the sixth form, this means achieving academic qualifications or preparing for the world of work. For others, also including some students in the sixth form, it means learning how to be more independent. However, this ambition is set against a backdrop of ineffective safeguarding procedures. This means that while some pupils benefit from some aspects of school life, insufficient attention has been paid to their safety.

The school is proud of the difference that it has made to the lives of many pupils over the years. However, the needs of the pupils at the school have changed significantly since the last inspection. Many who now attend the school, including a number of students in the sixth form, have more complex SEND. Although the school has enabled many of these pupils to become more independent, the current curriculum does not meet some of their most significant learning needs. This limits their success and achievement. While those pupils on the academic pathway typically achieve well, those with complex needs do not.

There is a well-designed and carefully ordered curriculum for those pupils following an academic pathway. The effective teaching of the letters and the sounds that they represent helps pupils to learn to read. Teachers provide pupils with regular

opportunities to apply their phonics knowledge to spelling and writing. This supports pupils to remember what they have been taught. The pupils who are at this early stage of learning to read are becoming more accurate and fluent readers.

The school prioritises the teaching of English and mathematics for pupils of compulsory school age. In these subjects, skilled staff ensure that they present new learning clearly. Pupils have many opportunities to revisit key knowledge. This helps them to remember what is important. Staff use assessment strategies well to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and inform their future teaching. They know how to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of the pupils. However, the range of subjects currently taught is too narrow and does not meet the independent school standards ('the standards').

The curriculum for pupils with complex needs is in the early stages of development. It is currently set out through individual learning plans with targets for the academic and personal needs of each pupil. This approach relies on staff having a high level of expertise. They need to know the appropriate next step in each pupil's learning once a target has been achieved. Some staff do not have this level of expertise. These targets also fail to address some of the most significant barriers to pupils' learning. For example, the school has not thought about how they will develop some pupils' communication skills. This limits their learning potential.

Several pupils have significant issues with managing their emotions and can display challenging behaviour. The school takes the time to get to know pupils well. Staff find out what interests individual pupils and what might trigger certain behaviours. Staff are appropriately trained to manage pupils' behaviours and they are skilled at helping pupils to regulate their emotions. In lessons, most pupils engage well and follow staff's instructions. Staff anticipate when pupils might need additional encouragement and they know how to motivate pupils to succeed. There are also some positive relationships between pupils, where they sometimes support each other in lessons.

The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum is adapted according to pupils' individual needs. So, for some, there is an emphasis on preparing to go to university. These pupils have a range of support to understand how to write a personal statement, or how to live in shared accommodation. For others, a life skills course teaches pupils about how to go shopping, how to keep a house clean, or how to manage personal finances. Almost all pupils are encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle through regular opportunities to exercise. Pupils greatly enjoy their weekly visits to the sports hall, where they experience a range of activities.

There are, however, some significant gaps in pupils' wider development beyond their subject studies. Pupils do not build up an appropriate understanding of relationships. They do not have enough opportunities to explore the beliefs or experiences of people from different religions or of different genders. There are limited opportunities to enhance pupils' cultural understanding and their knowledge of fundamental British values. The trips to places of worship, which used to happen in

the past, are no longer in the calendar of events. This means that some pupils are not as well prepared for life beyond school as they should be.

The school provides suitable careers guidance to those pupils and students who are on the academic pathway. A careers adviser visits the college annually to explore the range of options available with individual pupils. This enables pupils to choose whether they want to stay in education or move into employment when they finish their time at the school. Meaningful work experience or placements have also been organised for pupils. This helps prepare pupils for paid employment.

The school communicates regularly with parents and carers. This enables staff to understand what is happening in pupils' lives outside the school. It also helps staff to support pupils more effectively when they are facing challenging circumstances. Staff are positive about working at the school. They feel that leaders are considerate of their workload and well-being.

The proprietor has not ensured that they fulfil all of their statutory duties. They have not implemented the appropriate guidance on relationships and sex education (RSE). There are failed standards that relate directly to pupils' welfare, health and safety. Due to the length of time since the last fire risk assessment, and the failure to act on its recommendations, the school does not comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

The proprietor does not demonstrate a good enough understanding of the standards and how to meet them consistently. During the inspection, the proprietor actively sought to organise support from external sources to provide advice on aspects of health and safety during the inspection. However, many of these standards remained unmet.

The accessibility plan does not meet the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. It does not outline clearly the actions the school will implement to achieve the aims. So, for example, it states it will enable all pupils to access a broad and balanced curriculum. It does not, however, state the actions that it will take to ensure those with complex needs can access the curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders' knowledge of how to keep pupils safe is not reflected by some of the practice in the school.

Safer recruitment processes and statutory requirements are not followed closely enough. Staff waiting for a Disclosure and Barring Service check are not all checked against the barred list before they start working in regulated activity.

The school is not doing all that it can to protect pupils from harm online and offline. The school does not have an appropriate filtering and monitoring system in place to

check that pupils' use of the internet is not putting them at risk of harm. There are no opportunities within the curriculum to teach pupils how to stay safe online. In addition, there has not been any relationships or sex education for over a year.

For pupils who do not use verbal communication, there are no agreed systems of communication that would enable them to share their views, experiences or worries. The school relies on staff noticing changes in behaviour that could indicate something is wrong. When staff report concerns, the school does not record these in a way that enables them to easily gather an overview of pupils' experiences. The school also fails to record any follow-up actions that they have taken when staff have reported concerns.

Some pupils with identified medical needs do not have appropriate plans for staff to follow should there be a medical emergency. There is a lack of appropriate risk assessments for those pupils whose behaviour could pose a risk to others.

There are times when staff do not adhere to some aspects of school policy around supervision of pupils and intimate care.

There are some aspects of the school's approach to health and safety that pose a risk to pupils. The school has not included pupils' individual needs in plans for the safe evacuation of the building. The school have not acted to remedy an issue highlighted five years ago in their last fire risk assessment.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- There are significant weaknesses in the school's safeguarding arrangements. This puts pupils at potential risk of harm. The proprietor and the school must take urgent action to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.
- The school has not ensured that there is an appropriate programme in place to promote some aspects of pupils' personal development, for example online safety. This means that some pupils are not as well prepared for life outside of school as they need to be. The school should ensure that an appropriately wide-ranging programme is put in place to enrich all pupils' development and prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- The school has not ensured that the curriculum is meeting all pupils' needs. It does not provide the breadth of curriculum for compulsory aged pupils. The curriculum for pupils with complex needs is in the early stages of development. Furthermore, there is no structured approach to developing communication for pupils who are not currently verbal. As a result, some pupils do not achieve well. The school should ensure that the curriculum is developed to meet the needs of all of its pupils.
- Staff do not have the levels of expertise that they need to meet the needs of the pupils with complex SEND. As a result, these pupils do not learn and develop as well as they should. This limits their achievement. The school should ensure that

staff are sufficiently trained to understand and meet the needs of pupils with complex SEND, including how to teach appropriate methods of communication to those pupils who need it.

- The proprietor has not taken appropriate action to ensure that the standards are consistently met. These standards impact directly on pupils' welfare, health and safety and their learning. The proprietor must ensure that they monitor all aspects of the school's work. The proprietor should also make sure there are mechanisms in place to check compliance with regulations, including ensuring compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	143418
DfE registration number	330/6032
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10342118
Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 25
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	21
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	17
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Vivienne Lambert-Blackwood
Chair	Chester Morrison
Headteacher	Hermin McIntosh
Annual fees (day pupils)	£20,718 to £94,199
Telephone number	0121 5070904
Website	www.bicollege.org
Email address	info@bicollege.org
Date of previous inspection	1 to 3 February 2022

Information about this school

- Birmingham Independent College is a small independent day school for pupils and students aged between 14 and 25. It is located on Witton Road, Aston, Birmingham B6 5NU.
- At the time of this inspection, pupils on roll were aged between 14 and 22 years old.
- All pupils who attend the school have SEND. The school caters for pupils with a range of needs, including autism, and speech language and communication needs.
- Since the last inspection, there has been an increase in the number of pupils with complex SEND needs.
- The school also caters for pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The school does not use any 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.

- Inspections are a point in time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the head of college, the operations manager and the chair of the proprietor body. Inspectors also met with teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, physical education, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors considered the college's curriculum documentation, where there was documentation available. They also, visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. Inspectors met with pupils to discuss their learning in these subjects. Inspectors also spoke to pupils about their wider experiences of college.
- Inspectors also visited lessons in life skills and lessons for pupils with complex needs.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and

considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including school policies, risk assessments, attendance information and health and safety records.
- Inspectors took note of parents' and carers' responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey. Inspectors met with pupils to discuss different aspects of the school's provision.
- There were no responses to the pupil survey.
- The lead inspector toured the premises and reviewed the school facilities.

Inspection team

Helen Forrest, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David Hermitt

Ofsted 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; and
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(a) full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (construed in accordance with section 8 of the Education Act 1996), which gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education;
 - 2(2)(d) personal, social, health and economic education which-
 - 2(2)(d)(i) reflects the school's aim and ethos; and
 - 2(2)(d)(ii) encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act[9];
 - 2(2)(i) effective preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor-
 - 2A(1)(b) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with secondary education at the school is provided with relationships and sex education, except in so far as the pupil is excused as mentioned in sub-paragraph (2),
 - 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)(e) makes and keeps up to date a separate written statement of its policy with regard to the provision of education as required by each of paragraphs (a) and (b),
 - 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e), and
 - 2A(1)(g) publishes a copy of the statement on a website and provides a copy of the statement free of charge to anyone who asks for one.
- 2A(2) Arrangements made by the proprietor for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1)(b) must ensure that where a pupil's parent requests that the pupil is wholly or partly excused from sex education provided as part of relationships and sex education, the pupil is so excused until the request is withdrawn, unless or to the extent that the head teacher considers that the pupil should not be so excused.
- 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(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;
- 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
- 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor-
 - 5(a) actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs;
 - 5(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which-
 - 5(b)(iv) enable pupils to acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services in England;
 - 5(b)(v) further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures;
 - 5(b)(vi) encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act; and
 - 5(b)(vii) encourage respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic process, including respect for the basis on which the law is made and applied in England;

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.
- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005[12].
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 21(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor keeps a register which shows such of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question.
- 21(3) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is-
 - 21(3)(a) in relation to each member of staff ("S") appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether-
 - 21(3)(a)(ii) a check was made to establish whether S is barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the 2006 Act;

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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