

# Birmingham Independent College

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

**Inspection date**

25 March 2025

**Overall outcome**

**The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection**

## Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

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

*Paragraphs 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 3, 3(a), 3(d), 3(e), 3(g)*

- The previous standard inspection in October 2024 found that the school's curriculum for pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) was in the early stages of development. The curriculum was not well matched to pupils' needs, and staff did not have the levels of expertise required to deliver the curriculum. The inspection also found that the school had not thought about how to develop pupils' communication skills.
- Since the inspection, the school has begun to strengthen the curriculum and learning experiences for pupils with complex SEND needs. All staff have received training in communication strategies. Some staff are undertaking training in Makaton, and all staff have been trained in the school's approach to communication through pictures, symbols and words. The school is working collaboratively with other schools to ensure that it benefits from the expertise of other colleagues. However, this work is at an early stage of development and has not been implemented consistently.
- The proprietor has made a start to support staff to deliver the intended curriculum effectively. The proprietor understands the importance of high-quality professional development and support for teachers. The school is in the early stages of supporting staff to understand how to design learning that is sequential and builds effectively on pupils' prior knowledge. However, this work is in its infancy.
- As this work is incomplete, the independent school standards (the standards) remain unmet.

*Paragraphs 2(2), 2(2)(a), 2(2)(d), 2(2)(d)(i), 2(2)(d)(ii), 2(2)(i), 2A(1), 2A(1)(b) to 2A(2), 5, 5(a), 5(b), 5(b)(iv) to 5(b)(vii)*

- At the previous inspection, inspectors found that there were significant gaps in pupils' knowledge beyond their subject studies. Pupils did not have an appropriate understanding of relationships and sex education (RSE). They did not have enough opportunities to explore the beliefs or experiences of people from different religions or of

different genders. There were limited opportunities to enhance pupils' cultural understanding and their knowledge of fundamental British values.

- The school has worked at pace to ensure that pupils gain an age- and stage-appropriate understanding of relationships, sexual health and keeping healthy. The school acted quickly to consult with staff and parents about the new RSE policy. Leaders have worked closely with external experts to ensure that the policy and schemes of work are appropriate for pupils with autism and speech, language and communication needs. A new RSE scheme of work is in place, and staff have received training in how to deliver the learning to pupils.
- The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum has been developed to ensure that all pupils benefit. Leaders have ensured that pupils with the most complex needs learn how to be healthy and to keep themselves safe.
- The school has also introduced a detailed calendar of events and visits that enable pupils to learn about different faiths, cultures and beliefs. Pupils now learn about important religious and cultural events such as Remembrance Day and Ramadan.
- Through the development of communication strategies, staff now work effectively with pupils to ensure they have a stage-appropriate understanding of democracy and other British values. For example, pupils learn about making positive choices and respecting the views of others through choosing meals and snacks.
- These standards are now met.

### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

#### *Paragraphs 7, 7(a), 7(b)*

- At the standard inspection, inspectors found that the school was not doing all that it can to protect pupils from harm online and offline. The school did 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. The curriculum did not cover online safety well enough and there had been limited RSE taught to pupils. In addition, some of the systems for recording safeguarding concerns about pupils were not collected effectively enough. The school's systems did not ensure that pupils were safe from any risk of harm.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has acted with urgency to put in place a new system for reporting and recording safeguarding concerns about pupils. All staff have been trained in the new system. Records are detailed and actions are swiftly followed up. Staff are vigilant and understand what to do when concerns arise.
- The proprietor has made use of expert external advice to support the school's safeguarding work. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements now reflect those of the local authority where the school is based. This includes work to ensure that appropriate filtering and monitoring systems are in place. The school has also carried out risk assessments for those pupils who use technology that has internet access. Pupils learn about how to keep safe online through the school's PSHE curriculum.
- The proprietor has ensured that there is a suitable safeguarding policy in place and that this is published on the school's website. This policy has due regard to current statutory guidance.

- These standards are now met.

*Paragraphs 11, 12, 16(a), 16(b)*

- The previous inspection found that some pupils with identified medical needs did not have appropriate plans for staff to follow should there be a medical emergency. There was a lack of appropriate risk assessments for those pupils whose behaviour could pose a risk to others. In addition, actions from a previous fire safety risk assessment had not been acted on which meant the building was not safe in the event of a fire.
- The proprietor has addressed the issues raised by the fire risk assessment quickly. A new fire safety audit has been carried out and remedial action is in place to rectify any issues raised. The proprietor carries out regular checks on the school's emergency lighting and the fire alarm systems. Fire evacuation procedures and plans are up to date. The school has also ensured that risk assessments consider pupils' individual needs to ensure they are adequately supported to leave the building in an emergency.
- The school has written individual risk assessments for pupils who need additional support. These refer to needs such as physical and behavioural and if intimate care practices are needed. Staff know and understand the specific risks to pupils.
- These standards are now met.

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

*Paragraphs 21(1), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(ii)*

- At the previous inspection, the school had not ensured that safer recruitment processes and statutory requirements were followed closely enough. Staff who were awaiting a Disclosure and Barring Service check were not all checked against the barred list before starting work in regulated activity.
- The school has quickly rectified these issues. Appropriate checks have been completed on staff to ensure they are safe to work with pupils. The proprietor has ensured that leaders have an understanding of the appropriate checks that need to be in place before adults can work in the school.
- The proprietor plans to commission external checks on the single central record to ensure that it reflects the most current guidance.
- These standards are now met.

#### Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

*Paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b)*

- At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were not carrying out their roles effectively and had not ensured that the standards were met consistently. Additionally, leaders were not actively promoting the well-being of pupils.
- A lot of work has been completed to address some of the issues identified at the previous inspection. The school is outward looking and is working with appropriate external agencies and schools to ensure it receives effective advice and guidance to continue with the recent developments.

- Although there has been significant progress to ensure that pupils are safe, there is still more work to do to continue to develop the school's curriculum and the quality of its implementation for the pupils with the most complex SEND in the school.
- These standards remain unmet.

*Paragraph 34(1)(c)*

- At the previous inspection, leaders had not ensured that the well-being of pupils was being promoted effectively.
- The proprietor has ensured that pupils' well-being, safety and personal development is prioritised. Leaders understand their safeguarding responsibilities and systems to keep pupils safe are in place.
- The standards relating to pupils' safety and well-being are now met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school now has an appropriate accessibility plan in place.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

## School details

Unique reference number	143418
DfE registration number	330/6032
Inspection number	10392659

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

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	19
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	15
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Vivienne Lambert
Headteacher	Hermin McIntosh
Annual fees (day pupils)	£20,718 to £94,199
Telephone number	0121 507 0904
Website	<a href="http://www.bicollege.org">www.bicollege.org</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:info@bicollege.org">info@bicollege.org</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	15 to 17 October 2024

## 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.
- 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.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- This was the school's first progress monitoring inspection since its standard inspection in October 2024. The inspection was conducted without notice.
- Following the standard inspection, the Department for Education (DfE) required the school to prepare an action plan. This plan was statutory. Ofsted evaluated the plan on 3 January 2025. The DfE rejected this action plan. The school submitted a second action plan. Ofsted evaluated the plan on 7 February 2025, and this was also rejected by the DfE.
- The inspector spoke with leaders about leadership and management, the school's curriculum, provision for pupils' wider development and staff training. She also looked at a range of related documents.
- The inspection also considered the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the single central record of pre-employment checks and risk assessments. The inspector also looked at the school's system for logging safeguarding concerns.

### Inspection team

Eve Morris, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **The school does not 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
- 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 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;

### **The school now meets the following requirements of the independent school standards**

#### **Part 1. Quality of education provided**

- 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.

## **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**

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- 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils

#### **Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010**

- The school now meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The school has an appropriate accessibility plan.

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