

OUR KIDS

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PRIVATE SCHOOL REVIEWS

Albert College

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Since 1998, families have trusted Our Kids to help navigate the private school landscape. Drawing on years working with education experts, parents, and school insiders, Our Kids provides families with insights into the top schools—and into choosing the right school for a child.

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Preface

Every private school is unique, with its own character, facilities, programming, culture, and reason for being. No private school is right for every learner, but for every learner there is a right school. Your task—and it isn’t an easy one—is to find the right school for your child; the one that offers the right challenges and the necessary supports; the one where she feels comfortable and included; the one that allows him to grow into a sense of himself and his place in the world; the one where people laugh at their jokes, and ache in the same places. The one where they know, without question: those are my goals, these are my friends, this is my school.

About Our Kids

We know how hard it can be for you, as a parent, to research private schools. For more than two decades we’ve published Canada’s most trusted annual private school guide, building on insights gained over years of work. The *Our Kids Private School Reviews* series of

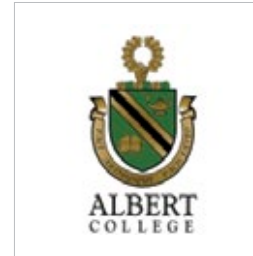
book-length reviews is aimed at information-seeking families, providing a detailed look at the offerings, the traditions, and the culture of each school. Titles published in this series to date include:

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| 1. Académie Westboro Academy | 21. Metropolitan Preparatory Academy |
| 2. Albert College | 22. Miss Edgar's & Miss Cramp's School |
| 3. Appleby College | 23. Pickering College |
| 4. Bond Academy | 24. Prestige School |
| 5. Branksome Hall | 25. Ridley College |
| 6. Brentwood College School | 26. Robert Land Academy |
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| 9. Crescent School | 29. Royal St. George's College |
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Details: Albert College

Location: Belleville, Ontario

Founded: 1857

Enrolment: 303 students

Grades: Pre-K to Gr. 12

Gender: Coed

Living Arrangements: Multi-Day, Boarding school

Curriculum: Traditional

Curriculum Pace: Standard-enriched

Academic Culture: Rigorous



Introduction

We visited Albert College on a beautiful Wednesday in May. The campus was abloom with flowering trees and there was a palpable buzz of activity. We arrived before 8:30 a.m. in order to join the Middle and Senior School students for Morning Chapel. This daily happening allows all students and faculty to gather in person for a short assembly where announcements are delivered alongside occasional special presentations.

Inside the historic Memorial Chapel, with its soaring arched ceilings and commemorative stained glass windows, the students share news about upcoming events including an art supply drive for the local Rotary Club, the results from the previous day's track and field meet and Ultimate Frisbee matches, and details of an upcoming "dress down day" to raise money for a graduation gift to the school. There's a lovely sense of ritual in these morning gatherings which serve instead of announcements delivered over a PA system (the school doesn't have one). It's also an opportunity for faculty and administrators to see every student and start each day on a positive note.

"The Chapel is the heart of our school," says Melanie Barrett, director of development. Other faculty share similar sentiments. They note that over the course of a school year they'll have the opportunity, through Morning Chapel, to watch students evolve from shy or quiet participants to confident members of the

community, delivering announcements and presentations, leading discussions, and even singing solos.

Beyond the morning gatherings, Chapel is where all of the school's music and theatrical performances take place, guest speakers address the student body, and prefects deliver "Chapel Chats," among other things. Although the heritage of the chapel worship is Christian and the space itself is a sanctified church with a large cross hanging at the front of the hall, the school today is non-denominational and all religious and cultural traditions are honoured here.

Morning Chapel is often used as an opportunity for students—many of whom come from around the world—to share their holidays and customs. "This is how students get to know one another and break down barriers," says Mark Musca, head of school.

With boarding students coming to Albert from all over the world, it makes sense that a focus on inclusiveness is built into the school's core values. But it's not just something they give lip service to. It's woven into every aspect of school life, from the books being purchased for the library, to the projects and art hanging on the walls, to student surveys being conducted and analyzed, to clubs that are often student led.

"We are taking an intentional approach to making equity, diversity, and inclusion visible in the classrooms," explains Dr. Suparna Roy, coordinator of teaching, learning, and innovation. "We focus on celebrating the contributions of each member of our school community, working with students to honour each other's similarities and differences."

The Basics

Founded in 1857, Albert College is Canada's oldest coeducational boarding and day school and has a rich and storied history. That being said, when you speak with the faculty, staff, and students, it's clear that progress, innovation, and diversity are all top of mind. It's definitely a school community that's looking toward the future.

Albert is located in the scenic and quiet town of Belleville, Ontario, situated conveniently off Highway 401 between Ottawa and Toronto (approximately two hours to each major city) and nestled on the shores of the Moira River and the Bay of Quinte. Just over the Belleville Bay Bridge, which is essentially across the street from campus, is Prince Edward County (PEC), a region of Eastern Ontario that's been growing in popularity among cottagers and families leaving the city for a more relaxed rural lifestyle. With the huge growth of tourism to the area, there's been a boom of resorts, restaurants, and wineries, many of which are internationally renowned.

Many international families choose Albert College because of its location, appreciating the safe, small town feel of Belleville, which has a population of 50,000, coupled with its access to nature and outdoor activities often associated with the Canadian way of life.

While historically Albert only accommodated students from Grades 7 to 12, today the school not only has a Junior School for students in JK through Grade 6 (established in 2003), but also an Early Primary Learning Centre for Pre-Kindergarten students as young as two and a half.

The campus consists of three buildings, all situated on a stunning 25-acre property scattered with mature trees, beautiful gardens, sports fields, tennis courts, play structures, and sunny open spaces for wandering with friends or studying outdoors. Albert is a small school with the total number of students sitting around 300 (with no intention to get much larger), but the outdoor and indoor spaces occupied by the school are anything but small.

Most Pre-Kindergarten and Junior School students live in the Belleville and the surrounding areas (busing is available), while senior students (Grades 7 to 12) are about half-and-half day and boarding, with the majority of boarding students coming from outside of Canada. Various part-time boarding options are available for local students as well, and are appreciated by those coming from Toronto, Kingston, and other nearby towns that are just a bit too far to commute to and from daily.

Albert prides itself on its rich curriculum and academic excellence (98% of the Class of 2022 graduated as Ontario Scholars) but also strongly believes in teaching the whole child. They do so by requiring all students to participate in co-curricular programming with a focus on arts, athletics, adventure, and active citizenship. They call these, along with academics, the Albert 'A's, and they are a significant part of the school's *raison d'être*.

"For us, the Ontario curriculum is the basement, not the ceiling," says Musca. "We are committed to the notion of whole-child education and providing each student with opportunities to excel in a variety of areas. We find that by making these co-curricular programs mandatory, students are able to explore an assortment of interests and discover hidden talents."

Musca joined Albert as head of school in August of 2019, replacing Keith Stansfield who retired after 14 years with the school. Musca spent the majority of his education career in the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, first as a teacher in both elementary and secondary schools and then as a department head, vice-principal, principal, and finally as a superintendent of

education. In 2015, he joined the independent school system and worked as the principal of Villanova College in York Region for four years prior to being recruited to Albert College. Musca's middle daughter graduated from Albert and his youngest is a current student. He and his family live on campus.

When you speak with members of the Albert community, one word you hear over and over again is "family." And, while it could seem trite, it's clear that the notion of family at Albert actually runs quite deep. International boarding students are often invited to day students' homes for holidays and long weekends, many teachers and faculty send their own children to the school, and alumni invite faculty to their weddings and baby showers years after graduating. The community at Albert—in part because of its small size, but also because of the value they place on it—is tight knit and closely connected.

"It really does feel like a family here," says Dianne Purdie, assistant head of the Senior School. "The Grade 9s and Grade 2s work on projects together, the Grade 6s come to the Senior School to Ackerman Hall for lunch once a week, and everyone knows each other, which is such a great feeling." She adds: "Even when I don't go down for lunch for a few days, the kitchen staff will say, 'we haven't seen you this week, what's up?'"

Small class sizes from JK through Grade 12 allow for individualized support and attention for all students in all grades. Learning needs are accommodated and parents talk about their students thriving in an environment that sees them as individual learners rather than just part of a collective. "Before our daughter started at Albert College, we had to provide her with a lot of help at home," says Maria Panaritou, mother of a Grade 11 boarding student who came to Albert from a Toronto private school. "We practically had to teach her ourselves. At Albert she does everything on her own with the support and help of her teachers. It's really amazing. They actually took the time to read her IEP and follow the recommendations, providing her with the tools and resources she needs to succeed."

All senior students are paired with an advisor for the duration of their tenure at Albert. The Advisor program, as it's called, is something that seems to work very well, ensuring every student has one teacher who follows their academic progress, emotional and social well-being, and overall success throughout their years at school. Students across various grades meet with their Advisor groups daily and it provides not only an opportunity for them to have a trusted adult to confide in, but also allows them to meet and connect in a meaningful way with other students from other grades.

“If you're feeling alone or overwhelmed or having any challenges, you can talk to your advisor. They're all teachers and they're all connected with the rest of the teaching staff, so if they notice an issue with a particular student, they'll take it to a staff meeting and consult with all of the student's other teachers. Kids get so close with their advisors that as alumni they often come back to visit with them specifically,” explains Dianne Purdie.

For those who choose Albert, Purdie says, most come to the school via word-of-mouth recommendations and know what to expect when they arrive. “The school has a strong network in a number of international countries and alumni often send their own children to Albert,” she explains. For those who explore a number of schools before deciding on Albert, Purdie describes a feeling families get when they come for an in-person tour of the school. “Once you visit Albert you'll know right away if it's the right place for your child. You'll feel it when you visit our school.”



Background

Take a walk down Alumni Hall, the hallway that connects the Memorial Chapel to the school's dining facilities, and you begin to get a sense of the deeply rooted history of Albert College. A tribute to the past, Alumni Hall is adorned with photographs of every graduating class dating back to 1857. The all-school "family photo" is always taken at the end of the year on the steps of the main building. For 2020 and 2021 a composite photo was created in view of the COVID-19 pandemic and the school's inability to gather in person those two years.

The school was established in 1857 as the Belleville Seminary by the Methodist Episcopal Church and the name was changed nearly a decade later, in 1866, to Albert College. Due to its strong academic record, the school received its university charter that year and was renamed Albert University in honour of Prince Albert, the Prince Consort of Queen Victoria. Affiliated with the University of Toronto, the school was at the time only accessible to male students. For female students a unit of its own was created within Albert College called the Belleville Ladies College.

For years, the school functioned as a university and granted university degrees. In 1917 part of the building—then on College Street—was destroyed by a fire and in 1923 construction began on the current building on Dundas Street West. That was a boys-only educational institution that didn't admit its first female students until 1934. The school evolved over the years, becoming a coeducational

school for students in Grades 7 through 12. Under the leadership of its principal, Reverend Albert Carman (1858 – 1874), the school flourished, producing many eminent graduates.

In September of 1930, in the midst of the Great Depression, the school was struggling. Albert was under the leadership of Reverend Dr. Charles W. Bishop at the time, but due to a number of circumstances beyond anyone's control, enrolment was declining and the financial situation was dire. When Bishop submitted his resignation, Reverend Dr. Bert Howard took over the leadership of the school. He was reluctant to leave his Saskatchewan parish but was convinced by the church that his skills were needed.

Under Reverend Howard's leadership, change began to take shape as the school found its way out of the Great Depression. Day girls were welcomed back to the school in 1934, The Manor was purchased in 1936 as the girls' dormitory, and the school hired a professionally qualified coach, Mr. N.A. "Pete" Beach, to create an athletic program. Life returned to the school, debts were paid off, and Howard, who had only intended to stay for a year, remained the guiding force of Albert College for 18 years.

To this day, Albert students connect with the school's history through its much-loved House League program, with Houses named after important individuals in the school's past: Deroche, Baker, Bishop, and Graham. Students compete all year long in a variety of sports, games, and activities for the title of House League champion.

The more recent history of Albert includes the construction of the Parrott Junior School in 2003 and the addition of the Early Primary Learning Centre and Pre-Kindergarten program in 2010. While Albert College has been through many iterations and has changed significantly over the years, some traditions, including holiday celebrations, convocation rituals, and a commitment to academic excellence, remain from its early days and keep the school tethered in its rich and interesting past.

Facilities

The Senior School, located at 160 Dundas Street West, is a historic, gothic-style building, built in 1923. “It looks just like Hogwarts,” exclaims a Grade 6 student who is preparing to graduate and move up to what the kids call “the big school” in September. Within the Senior School building are the Junior and Senior boys’ dormitories . While you feel the age of the building in the creaking floorboards while walking through the Senior School, the classrooms are equipped with all the technology and equipment needed to make them 21st century learning spaces.

Within the Senior School building is also the Middle School. Two open-concept classrooms house the Grades 7 and 8 students, and each is equipped with standing desks, state-of-the-art technology, and collaborative work spaces. Because there are only two classes, the students often work cross-curricular and/or cross-grades.

The main Health and Wellness Centre is equipped with hospital beds and examination facilities to support health-related issues. Two full-time nurses are employed by the school and doctors visit and hold clinics weekly. The school’s Health and Well-being Counsellor also works out of the Health and Wellness Centre.

The well-appointed dining room, Ackerman Hall, is housed in the Senior School. Flags adorn the ceilings of this great dining hall, representing all of the countries that students have come from over the years. Ackerman Hall serves a cafeteria style breakfast, lunch, and dinner as well as snacks. To promote social interaction and

mindfulness during mealtimes, there is a strict no-phones policy in Ackerman Hall.

Around the corner you’ll find the modern Parrott Junior School which was completed in 2003 and named after local philanthropists Jack and Bernice Parrott. Classrooms are spacious, well-lit, and adorned with colourful learning resources and student work. The Junior School has a computer lab, resource centre and library, full-service gymnasium, and a playground surrounded by ample green space. Upon entry into the school, you’ll find yourself in the Great Hall, the most collaborative space in the school. Students use the space to gather for lunch (which is provided daily), to rehearse for musical performances, and to host presentations, among other things.

There’s one additional Albert College building just beyond the main campus housing two facilities: the Early Primary Learning Centre and the girls’ dormitory, Victoria Manor. The Early Primary Learning Centre space also includes a full kitchen, a large outdoor play area, and a variety of learning spaces for children to engage in the play-based curriculum.

The Albert campus is beautiful and stately and there’s a true campus feeling that’s reminiscent of private schools depicted in movies and books. It’s no wonder staff talk about how much they love working here; it definitely feels like a comfortable space to work and live.



The Five 'A's

(Academics, Arts, Athletics, Active Citizenship, Adventure)

It's next to impossible to have a conversation about Albert College without mention of the "5 'A's." In fact, these academic and co-curricular requirements are, in many ways, the foundation upon which everything at Albert is built. We're told that this is something all families consider when deciding if Albert is the right fit for their child.

Albert College students are "A students" not just because of the grades that many end up achieving through hard work and commitment but even more importantly, because of the other 'A's they're exposed to within and beyond the classroom.

Heather Kidd, director of enrolment management, reiterates this point. "When parents choose Albert, they know that their child is coming to a great school and that 100% of our kids get into the universities and colleges of their choice—but they choose Albert because they want more than that."

The "more" comes in the form of a clever twist, where "A" not only represents "Albert" but is also incorporated into a well-rounded programming structure that ensures every student, no matter their skill or ability, participates in athletics, arts, active citizenship, and adventure every year that they're at Albert.

"We call this mandatory fun," says Erin Paul, the school's Florence Meta Moon Chair in Vocal Music.

And while not every student will consider all of these

co-curriculars fun at first, all of them end up pushing themselves in new directions, discovering hidden talents or skills, and finding a way to connect with each of the 5 'A's. There's always a way for every student to participate—and eventually end up having fun.

A student, for example, with no athletic interest or who is unable to compete athletically, may find themselves working as a team manager; while a student who isn't dramatically inclined may build sets or work as a stage director. Finding a way for each and every student to participate is part of the beauty of this program.

Many parents express the pleasure of having all co-curricular activities available in one place and accessible to all students. "Ever since my son started at Albert in Grade 9," says Fabiana Caldas, "he's been able to get everything he needs at the school. He participates in many sports teams, he has access to volunteer opportunities, and he gets support from his advisor if he's ever struggling. I no longer have to drive him all over the place for extracurricular activities or even help with his homework, everything is taken care of by Albert."

Academics / Academic Environment

As we wander the halls of Albert, peeking into classes in both the Senior and Junior Schools, it's clear that the school provides a vibrant learning environment. Classrooms have large windows looking out over the sprawling campus, there's plenty of state-of-the-art technology to amplify learning, and despite it being a beautiful spring day toward the end of the school year, students appear to be engaged and focused.

The Junior School is bustling with activity. "When I transferred to Albert College last year, I would wake up every day really excited to go to school," says Grade 6 student Annika Hirt. "Though the program was a lot harder than the public school I was at before, I was learning a lot more and it felt really rewarding. Before, I would struggle with math and my mom had to help me a lot—here the teachers help me any time I need it, and it's really great."

Outside of the gymnasium we stop to check in on the baby chicks which are on their way to becoming full-grown chickens at this point. The Junior School hatches the chicks from eggs each year and the kids get to watch them grow until they're ready to be returned to the farm where they came from. Hands-on science is a big part of the Albert curriculum, in both elementary and high school, and is something families love about the school.

As Senior School parent Maria Panaritou explains, "My husband

and I are science people and I was very interested in the fact that in the Senior School there are hands-on labs for chemistry, physics, and biology and that rather than just teaching theoretical science, they go outside and into the labs and they teach science in ways the kids can really relate to." Maria sings high praise for Ms. Foster, the science teacher who she says is able to instill a love of science in even "non-science" students.

Rachel Foster, who has taught math and science at Albert for a decade, says she was one of the only girls in her high school math and science classes, and her goal is to find more ways for girls to connect with and get excited about these subjects.

Small class sizes also help make the academic experience more accessible from a student perspective. When extra help or support is needed, students can access individualized learning, and for those who need to be challenged, there are opportunities for enrichment as well.

Annika's mom explains: "My son is in Grade 8, and when he transferred to Albert he was struggling. I was trying to figure out what to do with him to maximize his potential and I'm pleased to say after two years at Albert with their guidance and stewardship, he's turned it around. He's focused on getting good grades and becoming the young man I knew he could become."

Albert College is a university prep school and there's no doubt that value is placed on academics. Students are encouraged to aim high and succeed—while balancing the other four 'A's and taking on leadership roles. Graduates are well-prepared for post-secondary studies and have a wide variety of experiences, coupled with their grades, to include on their applications.

There's a school-wide focus on inquiry-based learning which allows, and encourages, students to think critically, ask questions, and explore their curiosity. And, while the school does follow the Ontario curriculum, they place a great deal of emphasis on going beyond government-requirements. In addition to the academic experience there is a focus on the school's core values of equity,

diversity, and inclusion (EDI), the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and learning skills.

“At Albert, the academic content is the vehicle to deliver all of these pieces, among others,” says Anne Beveridge, principal of the Junior School. “Ultimately our school is a university prep school, but beyond that we want our kids to go on to be successful and kind, we want them to be good human beings. And while we are the country’s oldest coed boarding and day school, we aren’t rigid in our academics—we have a progressive attitude and we know that we are preparing these students for jobs and careers we don’t even know about yet. We want to prepare them to navigate the world as it might be 10 years from now and beyond.”

Something that Albert College faculty talk about a lot is learning skills and the value the school places on these. This comes into play especially during the Middle School years. “In the Grade 7 and 8 years we really focus on the development of the child, the learning skills, and core values,” explains Albert teacher Mary Baker.

There are six learning skills outlined on the Ontario report card (the section in which students earn Excellent (E), Good (G), Satisfactory (S), or Needs Improvement (NI)). These are responsibility, organization, independent work, collaboration, initiative, and self-regulation. In Grades 7 and 8 there’s a great deal of emphasis placed on these skills—so much so that the Middle School has an honour roll for students who earn all Es on their report cards. “We talk about these a lot in class,” says Baker. “These are the life skills that matter when you go to post-secondary school and get a job. If students are struggling in any of these areas, we work with them constantly, providing immediate feedback after each class and helping them make improvements. We see a huge difference by the end of each year.”

The focus on learning skills and core values extends beyond the classroom into every aspect of school life. “We role-model these, pause when things happen in the school, on field trips, at lunch, and take every opportunity to really teach students and to lead by example,” says Baker.

From Grades 9 to 12 there is a great deal of emphasis placed on leadership, which begins with team-building and working well with others in Grade 9 and ends with taking on a number of leadership roles within the school in Grades 11 and 12. At the end of the students’ Grade 11 year, prefects are elected by the student body into leadership positions they hold for the duration of their last year at the school.



Arts

On the day of our visit, Albert College was adorned with impressive works of art on display as part of the school's 26th annual Student Art Exhibit. As part of the yearly showcase, students from Grades 7 to 12 submit their work, which is adjudicated by a panel of local artists. The pieces range from photography and digital art to watercolour, oil, and sketches, and show the scope and quality of work Albert students are capable of.

The arts are a big deal at Albert. All students from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 participate and engage in artistic instruction. All classes are led by faculty, specialized artists, and instructors and tailored to each student's abilities to ensure that everyone from beginners to experienced artists get something out of the program. Students are exposed to the arts in class and during "Arts Period," which is a unique program offered three times a week in addition to regular arts classes. Some opportunities provided during Arts Period include, but are not limited to, concert and jazz band, choir, musical theatre, textile arts, painting and sculpting, chess club, and photography.

"It's a well-known fact that arts education results in transferable skills that can be applied to the rest of a student's academic life," explains Erin Paul who teaches music and runs the choir at Albert. Having spent 18 years at the school, Paul is well versed in the benefits that the school's weekly Arts Period has on students of all ages. "Things like teamwork, collaboration, and confidence all come

directly from the arts, as do goal setting and risk taking." Many students come to Albert with little or no experience in music or visual arts and leave with a life-long passion. "Just like you'd hope every student continues to remain physically fit after they graduate, we also hope our students will continue to participate in the arts in some way as a creator or a consumer and find those creative outlets that help to balance their mental health and well-being," she explains.

Beyond the annual art exhibit, the school produces a number of arts events including musicals, concerts, dramatic arts performances, and AC Superstar, a student talent show.

While some students are nervous to participate in performing arts, Albert provides a safe space for them to lean into their fear. "What they find at Albert is other kids, like them, who may be struggling to take these risks. They're never doing it alone," says Rachel Foster. "And we provide so many options that there's always something they're willing to try or something they're curious about. It's a very safe environment for these kids to explore and experiment with new things."

"I'll never forget the reaction of a parent whose son recently graduated," says Mark Musca, head of school. "The student came to Albert in Grade 10 and he was very active in sports and quite involved in many teams. Well, he ended up with the lead role in the play and he got really excited about it—and that parent, she still talks about it to this day, how surprised and delighted she was."

Athletics

It's not uncommon for Senior students to come to Albert—especially those from other countries—with really strong academic accomplishments but less exposure to co-curriculars.

Kiwi Yang can relate. Born and raised in China, Kiwi and her family moved to Winnipeg for her Grade 9 year, where she attended a public high school. For her Grade 11 year she moved to Ontario to join Albert as a boarding student. “Back in China there was a huge focus on academics but there wasn't a lot of opportunity to be involved in athletics or arts. So, at my school in Winnipeg I couldn't get onto any of the school's sports teams because I didn't have any experience or skills,” she recalls. “One of the things I really like about Albert is that you can sign up for a sports team even if you don't know how to play it. This year I've been playing basketball and soccer and I love it.”

Every student at Albert is required to participate in athletics. These programs take place mostly after school for the Senior School students. While not everyone has to play on a competitive team, there are plenty of competitive opportunities for those who are interested. The school also provides ample opportunity to learn and improve at sport—no matter your skill level.

This inclusive athletics programming is something Albert is recognized for. “We use our athletics program as one of our character-building pieces,” explains Kara Mayer, the school's athletic director. “There are so many essential life skills you can garner

from playing sports including leadership, teamwork, honesty, communications, and actual athletic skillsets, among other things.”

The school has the facilities to match the programming. With two full-sized soccer fields, a smaller field for field hockey and lacrosse, a ga-ga ball court in the Junior School yard, a full-sized gym in both the Senior and Junior Schools, a weight room, two squash courts, and a yoga space inside the girls' dormitory, there's no shortage of space to practice and play. The school also utilizes state-of-the-art facilities in the community like the Quinte Sports and Wellness Centre, which is just a short drive away and houses an Olympic-sized pool and a number of ice rinks among other things. Swimmers are bused to the Belleville Wellness Centre for swim practice. Albert athletes compete regularly against other independent schools.

“Our ultimate goal is to encourage students to push themselves outside of their comfort zones, take risks, and explore their potential to see what skills they can develop,” Mayer explains. “If athletics wasn't a mandatory part of our student life, I know some students would be too afraid to try it. Taking that chance and trying something new is embedded in the culture at Albert.”

Active Citizenship & Adventure

The final two ‘A’s contribute in a meaningful way to the “whole-child” focus of the school. Active citizenship aligns with the school’s vision to develop courageous global citizens across all grades by providing leadership and community service opportunities. Through these programs, students become actively involved in the civic life of the school, the local community, and the world. Albert students of all ages volunteer for a variety of local, national, and international causes, allowing them to go way beyond the requirement of 40 hours of community service prior to graduation.

For the Junior School, active citizenship looks like educating students on the importance of giving back to their community through programs like a local food drive, Jump Rope for Heart, a Terry Fox Run, in-class assignments, and leadership opportunities within the school.

All of this continues into the Middle and Senior Schools with increased opportunities to take the lead when it comes to school clubs and committees and partnership with local and global communities. Other active citizenship opportunities include an annual winter mitten drive, Big Brothers Big Sisters mentorship programs run within the school, and an annual program called “Sleep out so others can sleep in,” where senior students sleep outside in the winter to raise money and awareness for homelessness. Most recently, Albert College joined the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund

(DWF) as a Legacy School. DWF is a national initiative to ensure the unique interests, rights, and perspectives of Indigenous peoples are recognized and implemented in schools.

“We hosted a school-wide Walk for Wenjack and built in an arts component which saw a local musician performing the Secret Path Collection in conjunction with Orange Shirt Day. In all we raised close to \$1,000 for the cause and this is certainly something we’ll continue doing annually going forward,” explains Mary Baker.

Adventure is embedded in both the history and culture of Albert College. Perhaps it’s the setting of the school, being so close to many of Ontario’s stunning natural resources, or the desire to introduce and foster a love of nature for those students coming to the school from around the world. Or perhaps it’s the innate understanding that when you put students together in the wilderness, bonds form that just can’t be replicated in the classroom. For all of these reasons, Albert takes its adventure program very seriously.

For the Senior and Middle School students, every school year begins, as it has since 1973, with an Orientation Camp. Students and faculty spend a few days and nights every fall at Camp Tamakwa in Algonquin Park. “Many of our boarding students arrive in Belleville feeling nervous, not about how they’ll do academically—these are all strong students—but about how they’ll fit in and make friends,” explains Heather Kidd, the house director in the girls’ dormitories. “They go to camp very soon after arriving, and it’s amazing how quickly they all start to form friendships—they not only get to know their fellow students really well, but they also get to connect with staff and faculty outside of the classroom, to know them as people. That’s really powerful.”

“I had never been to sleepaway camp and the concept was completely new to me,” recalls Thomas Evans, a Grade 12 boarding student from Bermuda. “For me camp is the foundation of what Albert is all about. In those few days at camp, people are able to connect and have fun, and really be themselves.”

Adventure programming continues throughout the year at

Albert for students across all grade levels, from day trips and field trips, to local nature hikes, outdoor games, and more. The Middle School ends each year with a curriculum-based trip to either Montreal or Quebec City and the Senior School offers students the opportunity to go on a March Break adventure or community service trip.

Albert also offers students the opportunity to work toward various levels of the internationally recognized Duke of Edinburgh Award. Completing the requirements of this program is more accessible with the 5 'A's integrated into every student's experience. "It's actually ideal for Albert students," says Erin Paul who is the school's Duke of Edinburgh award leader. "I love that the program focuses on goal setting and it's something they have to work on together over a long period of time. It's a program that looks good on a university and/or job application and tells others that you're a well-rounded individual. For those students who participate in the Duke of Ed, it's always a really positive growth experience."

Diversity, Inclusion, and Core Values

One would be remiss to talk about an educational institution in 2022 without looking at diversity, equity, and inclusion and the school's efforts to create a safe space where all students and faculty can be their authentic selves. Albert is certainly aware of all the work that needs to be done in this space, and is constantly re-evaluating and examining its programs, protocols, and curriculum.

The school's core values play an integral part in all of this. They're re-examined every time the school does its strategic plan, which is every five years. And, they're not just something that's posted to the website for good measure. You'll find the core values all over the school, written out in classrooms, talked about in Chapel, and integrated into all sorts of school curricular and co-curricular programs. The Albert values are individuality, compassion, integrity, and inclusiveness—which work hand in hand with the school's DEI mandate.

"I'm fairly new to Albert, and one thing that really struck me when I started was how they really eat, sleep, and breathe their core values," says Ann Beveridge, the Junior School principal.

Under the leadership of Dr. Suparna Roy, the school's coordinator of teaching, learning, and innovation, Albert has been working on making DEI even more of a priority. As Dr. Roy walks us around the school, she talks about the need for schools to change and adapt

along with the times. She explains: “We have been looking at DEI at the student level, but also at the faculty, board, and school-wide community level, and finding entry points in all of those areas. When we look at DEI, we want to look at gender inclusivity, racial justice, and indigeneity. This year we’ve focused on the latter two, with an intention to do more around gender in the coming years.”

From guest speakers, staff professional development, and DEI conversation circles, to book clubs shared with other independent schools, to a student Black Excellence Committee and a partnership with the Mohawk community in Belleville, Albert is taking a mindful approach to ensuring a more diverse and inclusive program structure.

One of the first things you’ll see when you arrive on Albert’s campus is a rainbow pathway leading into the school. The Peace Wall in the admissions office has each value listed on the wall with tons of sticky notes created by students with examples of the values written on them. And, inscribed on a piece of stone just outside of the school’s main doors, you’ll notice the words “We favour peace and the arts of peace.” While the motto dates back to 1857, it holds true to this day.

With an international community of students from so many different countries, ensuring all students feel part of the community is essential at Albert. “The goal is to express our inclusivity from more of a cultural competence standpoint—which means taking the time to understand how our students identify, what celebrations they honour, and ensuring all of those are built in to the school calendar,” Dr. Roy says. A student-led survey is beginning to gather more of this information and will continue to unfold over the coming school years.

Within the boarding houses, issues do arise, as one would expect with so many young people coming together with different beliefs, values, and cultures from around the world. To help work through and learn from these issues, Albert has a strong team, including one of the male boarding house directors who will be working on his master’s degree in cultural diversity next year at Queen’s University.

While the school recognizes that DEI is a work in progress, there’s no doubt that work is being done. The question Albert faculty continue to ask and consider is, “Do the students see themselves in the curriculum?” This guides the work they do when it comes to evolving classroom materials and projects, explains Dr. Roy.

Having spoken with many Albert families it seems that the diversity within the Albert community is actually one of the drawing cards for local day students. “My husband and I weren’t born in Canada, and the reason we put our son into Albert rather than another private school is because it has a global population and our kids are able to gain more international exposure here than they were at their former school in Kingston,” explains one parent. “We like to travel with our kids and they’ve been many places in the world, and when we come back to Kingston sometimes it feels a little like a box—but going to Albert, they’re meeting kids from all over the world and it gives them a better sense of other cultures. We really appreciate that.”

“The ideal Albert student,” says Rachel Foster, “is someone with an open mind, willing to try new things and take risks in a safe way, put themselves out there, make connections with all sorts of people, not just those in their own cultural group, and really be part of a community that takes care of one another.”

It seems that with such a focus on core values, it would be hard to join the Albert community and not live and breathe the ethos of the school. “What has remained unchanged for many years at Albert is the pillars upon which this school is built—the values and systems that create a feeling of connection and family within the school. You can talk to alumni from decades past, and while other things may have changed, this will always remain the same,” says Melanie Barrett.



Student Life

Being a student at Albert means being part of a family and with that comes certain responsibilities and also certain things you can come to expect.

“I’m new to Albert College and this is my third CAIS school, and for me, as a parent and an educator, what’s struck me most of all is that people at Albert live and breathe the ethos of care in a way I haven’t seen in any other school,” says Junior School Principal Anne Beveridge.

The sentiment that teachers genuinely care about their students’ well-being was echoed throughout many of the interviews we did. And the culture of care extends to the students as well. “This school really is like a family,” one Senior student told us.

Students are expected to live and breathe the school’s core values. They are given the autonomy to express themselves, follow their passion, try new things, and grow into good human beings. “The best part of Albert is that I’ve been able to have space to grow as a person and learn in a comfortable environment,” says Thomas, a Grade 12 student.

Everyone knows everyone at Albert, which means no one can fly under the radar. In its small size lies the power to keep tabs on all the students—in a good way.

Boarding

Nearly one-third of the school’s population are boarders, so it’s no wonder there is a huge emphasis placed on the boarding culture at Albert. The majority of boarders are international students, but many local students who live in the Toronto and Kingston areas take advantage of the school’s two-, three-, and five-day boarding options. This part-time boarding program allows students to spend weekends at home and weekdays at school where they can concentrate on academics, participate in athletics, and fully explore the arts.

The boarding day is structured to ensure student success. Every evening, after students have participated in athletics and had dinner, there is a mandatory, supervised study hall from 7 to 9 p.m. when homework is done. This provides the routine many students need and ensures they have time to complete school work with help from faculty members.

“I can’t say enough about the Albert boarding program,” says Maria Panaritou. “They drive my daughter to buy groceries, the nurses have been incredible when she’s needed extra care, the kitchen cooks specifically for her dietary requirements, and my daughter has told me time and again that while she does miss her family and friends in Toronto, Albert feels like her second home, she’s so comfortable there.”

The feeling within the girls’ dormitory is certainly that of a home. Doors are adorned with each girls’ name and the country

where she comes from. Rooms are spacious and the students have decorated them with care. Albert offers boarding to both male and female students from Grades 7 to 12. Baker House and Graham Hall house Junior boys and Senior boys respectively and Victoria Manor is where all the female boarding students live.

Because the Albert dorms are their own mini global village, boarding students have the unique opportunity to live with and learn from students from around the world, sharing cultures and traditions in a home-like environment.

Heather Kidd is the house director of the girls' residence. She's raised her own family in Victoria Manor and feels a strong connection to the boarding students. "We have an open-door policy day and night: if you need to chat, we are here for you. If a parent needs to get in touch, we'll answer WhatsApp messages at all hours. We are the students' family while they're away from home, and these relationships are extremely important to us," she says.

The boarding culture at Albert extends into the weekends, when numerous activities are planned by the students and dorm staff. These include movie nights, outings to local restaurants, day trips to Prince Edward County and Toronto, among other things. "Last weekend we took all the girls to Toronto for Fashion Week and the weekend before we went vintage shopping in PEC," Kidd explains. "We like to keep them busy and always having fun."

Day and boarding students form strong connections and friendships from the minute they go to Orientation Camp together in September, and day families often invite international students to their homes for holidays and school breaks. Many day students join in on boarding excursions when there's space. The cohesive community at the school doesn't separate boarders from day students—the family unit extends to all of Albert College.

Pastoral Care – Health & Wellness

In the post-COVID-19 pandemic world, student well-being is more important than ever. It's on the minds of educators across the country and no longer something that's relegated to a specific team or department. The entire Albert community, we're told, is focusing on student mental health and well-being and it's integrated into classrooms, co-curriculars, boarding life, and beyond. "It takes all of us to raise the village and to build a supportive community, and we're really good at that," says Jennifer Fagan, the school's counselor who works out of the Health and Wellness Centre.

Operating with the understanding that physical and mental well-being are all-encompassing and go hand in hand, Albert takes a holistic approach to student care. "We are working diligently to reduce the stigma around mental health while providing a solutions-focused approach to supporting students through counseling services," Fagan says. From supporting boarding students in ensuring they are eating well and getting enough sleep to ensuring all students are physically active and creatively stimulated—Albert considers the whole student when looking at well-being.

Morning Chapel provides an ideal opportunity for faculty to check in on students, monitor well-being, and discuss important topics with the whole Senior School. The Advisor program is another checkpoint for faculty to keep tabs on every student and

their overall well-being. There's also an understanding at Albert that every culture has a different conception of mental health and wellness, so educators must be open-minded when supporting boarding students from around the world.

The school has seen an increase in kids accessing counselling services within both the Junior and Senior Schools. Within the Junior School, Anne Beveridge, the principal, says she works closely with families to ensure students are well supported. "We have also increased our focus on mindfulness in the classroom and are working to give students the language they need to talk about how they're feeling and what they're experiencing."

Both schools have a "student of concern" program that ensures every student is provided with the support they need when they're struggling—mentally, emotionally, socially, or academically. Because the school is so small and the faculty work so closely together, they're all in constant communication about these students and work together to find solutions.

When it comes to behaviour, the school takes a progressive discipline approach. "In the Junior School, we know that children are going to make mistakes and we don't demonize them as a result," says Beveridge. "You did something wrong, we still love you, and we'll help you figure out a way to move forward, to make amends, and to learn from your mistakes."

The same is true in the Senior School. Rules are clearly laid out and the goal is to ensure a cohesive community where students feel safe and can trust one another. "We focus on restorative justice," explains Dianne Purdie, assistant head of the Senior School, "It's hard to live so closely with someone if you've done them wrong and can't make amends." The goal is always to find solutions and repair any damage that's been done.

The school uses external experts and guest speakers to address issues as they come up. Juno Award-winning musician Serena Ryder spoke to students in 2022 about her mental health journey as part of the school's annual Shewfelt Memorial Lecture,

which sees prominent figures visit the school to lecture on topics of interest. From a recent presentation by Paul Davis about online safety to engagement with a local psychology association talking about mental health, there's no shortage of resources available to the Albert community.

Active citizenship is also used as a tool to support student well-being. "We know that giving back and contributing to your community has a huge impact on empathy, your sense of purpose, and feeling good about yourself," says Fagan. "Something we do a really good job of at Albert is helping kids live the importance of giving back."

Beveridge agrees. "I had a Grade 6 student who was really struggling with anxiety, and watching him take on a leadership role in our annual Jump Rope for Heart event was really powerful. It changed his whole affect."

Whenever possible, Albert uses leadership opportunities as a way to boost student morale and provide kids with areas they can take ownership of and thrive in. "When you give to your community, it gives back to you ten-fold," Beveridge says.

at Albert will go out of their way to ensure families have access to all of the information they need and they make the whole process quite seamless.

Getting In

To begin the enrolment process, parents pay a \$100 fee and complete an online application. Once that's submitted, an Albert enrolment associate contacts the family to provide guidance and assistance through the remainder of the process. Admissions to Albert requires two years of academic report cards, a teacher evaluation, and an entrance test for students in Grades 7 through 12. If the applicant's first language isn't English, they may also be required to submit language test results.

"Once all of that is complete, we arrange for in-person or virtual interviews," says Heather Kidd, director of enrolment management. "The type of students we are looking for at Albert are those who are willing to get fully involved in the 5 'A's program and are willing to step outside of their comfort zone. We don't have a cut off for grades specifically, but clearly, we are an academic school and all of our courses are only offered at an Academic level."

"I really liked the interview process," recalls Grade 6 student Annika who started at Albert in Grade 5. "It was very formal and professional but I enjoyed it, it was so nice to act professional."

Incoming families are invited to spend a day at Albert, which was when Annika says she knew the school was perfect for her. "There was a small cohort of girls in Annika's year," her mom recalls, "and when we came to visit, they all swarmed around her, so excited to welcome her to the school."

Parents we spoke to all seem to agree that the admissions team

Money Matters

Albert is committed to ensuring that as many students who want to attend the school are able to do so. “We are a small school and we are more than willing to work with families to create payment plans that work for them. We want to do whatever it takes to make tuition affordable and doable for our families,” Kidd explains.

Albert’s tuition fees are on par with other similar independent schools. Included in the fees are all program-related activities including camp, leadership programs, travel and related admission fees required by the school’s athletic and cultural programs, and most weekend social events. All meals are provided for boarding students, while lunch and snacks are provided for day students and are included in fees.

There are a variety of scholarships and bursaries that can help make the school more accessible to deserving students. An application process is required prior to being considered for any of these. “The tuition assistance program is based on need and available to deserving students from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12,” Kidd says. “This program is meant to supplement tuition fees, not cover them fully, and students must re-apply for this funding each year. We try to spread the financial aid out to as many families as possible.”

Scholarships tend to range from \$2,000 to \$10,000 and are awarded by merit and achievement to students in Grades 7 through 12. These are awarded for the duration of a student’s time at Albert.

There are some specific scholarships for students coming to

Albert from different countries. Many students from Bermuda, for example, have access to the Frederick Sydney Smith ‘31 Scholarship.

Bursaries are also available. These are awarded annually based on academic achievement, citizenship, personal interests such as music, art, and athletics, or student leadership. Students must be accepted by Albert College before being considered for the scholarship and bursaries. “Frederick was an Albert student who left his estate to the school,” Kidd explains. “The idea is for students from Bermuda to experience what Frederick did at Albert. The Frederick Sydney Smith ‘31 Committee, comprised of Albert College alumni, reviews the applications and chooses the recipients.”

The Takeaway

Albert College is an international university preparatory school with a strong commitment to academic excellence and an even stronger commitment to whole-child education achieved through mandatory co-curricular programming. Students leave Albert as global citizens ready to take on real-world challenges. The values of individuality, compassion, integrity, and inclusiveness are brought to life in the classroom and through everyday activities from Kindergarten through Grade 12, and all students are expected to live these values. Family is something the school takes very seriously and staff and faculty work tirelessly to create an environment where everyone is welcome, connected, safe, and comfortable taking risks and thriving.

Albert provides an ideal day school for local residents of Belleville and the surrounding areas and boarding school for students from the GTA, across Canada, and around the world. Students who thrive at Albert are those who are willing to participate in a variety of activities as well as academics, are inclusive and kind, and like the idea of being part of a small and strongly interconnected family. They are risk takers, go-getters, and cheerleaders. They are individuals who have a strong moral compass, a passion for learning, an open mind, and a willingness to try new things. While Albert College is Canada's oldest coed day and boarding school, the school is staunchly committed to growth and development, innovation, diversity, equity, and inclusion. It's a modern school in a stunning, historic setting with ample access to nature and green space.



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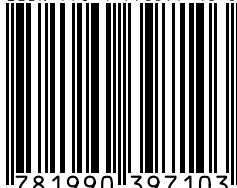
“The focus on learning skills and core values extends beyond the classroom into every aspect of school life.”

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