

Magdalen Court School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Magdalen Court School is a small co-educational day school for children aged between four and 18 years. It occupies purpose-built premises located in the centre of Exeter. The school is registered for 150 pupils. Currently, there are 122 pupils attending the school; of these, 17 children are in the Early Years Foundation Stage, with three children being placed in a Year 1 class. Four pupils have a statement of special educational needs, three of whom have their places funded by their local authorities. There is a separate registered nursery on site, which was inspected in March 2009. The school was established in 1991 and is in the ownership of the Jenner Family Trust. It was last inspected in January 2008. The proprietors have requested a material change to increase numbers to 350 pupils. This inspection considered the viability of this request.

The school aims to provide 'firm discipline and a happy, caring, atmosphere which is conducive to learning'. It also seeks to 'assist character building and leadership potential' supported by a range of outdoor pursuits.

Evaluation of the school

Magdalen Court School provides a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils and the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Within the satisfactory curriculum, there are many good opportunities for enrichment. This, combined with the good quality of welfare, health and safety, ensures that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Improvements since the last inspection have been satisfactory and the school now meets all but one of the regulations. Regulations relating to safeguarding children are met. Teaching and assessment are satisfactory overall but are inconsistent in their impact on learning, which results in satisfactory progress for pupils over their time in school.

Approval is recommended to increase the registration to only 250 pupils in the main school subject to meeting the requirements to provide sufficient washrooms as stated in regulations 3 and 4 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. The school provides a broad range of experiences which includes all the required areas of learning. The curriculum takes close account of the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance and the National Curriculum and includes a good range of GCSE courses for secondary-age pupils. In keeping with its aims, there is a strong focus on physical challenge and outdoor pursuits. The school has improved the provision for the small number of post-16 students and arranges for external tutors to provide additional A-level courses where necessary. Schemes of work have also improved since the last inspection to ensure a balance of topics is taught as pupils move through the school. The school successfully personalises the GCSE coursework with a carefully planned programme of modules and practical topics.

There is now a well-planned programme for personal, social and health education that starts in the Reception class and culminates in a GCSE in health and social care that all pupils take in Year 9 or Year 10. The topics include relationships, keeping healthy and avoiding drug abuse. The careers, citizenship and multicultural education programme now meets regulations. It is comprehensive and, when combined with the careers advice and guidance, ensures pupils are suitably prepared for their future lives. Parents make a valuable contribution to broadening this programme by sharing with pupils their own experiences of work and career pathways. Pupils with special educational needs receive regular individual support and those who have a statement of special educational needs have their requirements met in full.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory overall, as it was at the last inspection. Teachers' subject knowledge and their positive relationships with pupils are strong features. Although good teaching is evident in the school, the monitoring of teaching and learning is not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the best features are shared across all key stages. Activities are generally well matched to the pupils' differing needs and abilities, with additional support provided to help those with particular learning needs. However, some teachers do not explain clearly enough in lessons what they expect pupils to learn and there is insufficient reference to these objectives during question-and-answer sessions. In the weakest lessons, there is a distinct lack of challenge in the questions asked of pupils. Here, too much of the teaching is overly directed by the teacher, with not enough attention given to allowing pupils to be more involved in learning practically. Where teaching is good or better, teachers anticipate the difficulties pupils may experience and use techniques such as pupil discussions to encourage pupils to be actively involved in their learning. Resources and classroom displays fail to make a useful contribution to pupils' learning. The outdoor resources for the children in the Reception class are uninspiring and place some constraints on their physical development. Pupils say that they are helped to understand how to improve their work by having good discussions with their teachers and sometimes through the marking of their work.

The framework for assessing pupils' progress now meets requirements. In Key Stage 4, assessments are carried out through the completion of end-of-module tests or by testing pupils against GCSE requirements. Regular assessments are now being carried out by teachers in Key Stages 1 and 2, but these are not rigorously evaluated to identify gaps in pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. Assessment information is not always used well to plan lessons to meet pupils' needs. Work has begun to remedy these shortcomings and, as a result, specific targets have been introduced to enable teachers to assess pupils' work more thoroughly. This is helping to show the progress that pupils make over time. It is the intention that this action will inform teachers' planning more effectively than is the case with current assessment practice at the moment.

Pupils' work indicates that they make satisfactory progress over time in line with their capabilities and the school's expectations. Progress often accelerates in Year 10 and Year 11 and the sixth form, because staff are more proficient at analysing data and evaluating reasons for different levels of performance.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and has improved. All pupils are really positive about the relationships they have with the staff and with each other; younger pupils say that the school is like a big family. Pupils' spiritual needs are well met by using the opportunities provided for reflection such as in circle time and by attending local church services. Robust procedures reinforce appropriate behaviour and pupils contribute effectively in celebrating the successes of others. Pupils from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds are supportive of each other and get on really well together. As a result, they say the school is largely free of any bullying or racism. The good opportunities afforded for their personal development through the curriculum is reflected in their behaviour, which is good, and improved since the last inspection. From an early age, pupils display a strong sense of belonging, possess confident social skills and are polite and courteous. Attendance is satisfactory. The impact of a few pupils taking extended holiday absences during term time means it is not as good as at the last inspection.

Pupils' contribution to the school and wider community is satisfactory. Whilst some pupils have responsibilities for day-to-day management, for example through the school council, which has worked to improve sixth form facilities and to promote healthy eating, other opportunities are limited. Pupils told inspectors they would like to be involved with other schools, whilst parents consider more opportunities for younger pupils to visit local places of interest would be welcomed. Pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence are raised through participation in the outdoor pursuits programme. Effort and achievement are recognised by the awarding of house points and badges and when they gain national awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Pupils are very well known as individuals by their staff, and pupils say that staff show exceptional care and concern. Relationships between pupils and staff are good, and pupils are supervised well. Pupils feel safe from bullying and have confidence that it will be dealt with constructively should it occur. Pupils report that the principal's door is always open for parents and carers to talk through any problems being experienced by their children at school and seek a resolution. Each class has appointed a representative for the school council, whose members show concern for those who are experiencing problems. Pupils say that this works well. Encouragement is given to pupils to follow active and healthy lifestyles and they appreciate the benefits of exercise through their regular access to sporting activities.

Staff have undertaken the appropriate child protection training in matters of safeguarding pupils' welfare. All policies and procedures are robust and now meet requirements. Risk assessments are regularly completed across all aspects of school life. The school's good attention to health and safety is supported by a suitable policy and accurate records are kept of regular fire drills and testing of fire equipment. The very positive code of conduct underpins the high expectations contained within the behaviour policy and staff are good role models in this respect. Pupils say that teachers are fair with rewards and punishments. The school complies with the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) as amended.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Effective checks and safeguards are in place to ensure that pupils do not encounter unsuitable adults. Staffing and recruitment procedures are secure, and all checks undertaken are recorded on a single central register, as required.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The provision enables students to learn safely. Good use is made of the specialist rooms, including a well-resourced computer suite, to support teaching and learning. The sixth form study rooms are well equipped and provide a pleasant environment for learning. A new sick bay area has a bed, washbasin, adjacent toilet and first aid resources. There are a suitable number of toilet facilities to cater for staff and pupils. However, there are insufficient washbasins available for both the boys and girls, and the water in their washrooms is currently not at the appropriate temperature. The changing rooms attached to the large sports hall are inadequate for pupils over 11 years of age. They are too small, lack adequate facilities for changing in private and there are no showers, as is required. There is a large sports hall and sufficient space for the numbers currently registered is provided for outdoor recreation.

Provision of information

The school now meets all regulations. The prospectus for parents and carers contains all the required information. Termly reports are completed for each pupil and are shared with parents and carers each term. These contain sufficient detail on their achievements. Meetings are held at the required intervals to review the statements of special educational needs and to consider their personal education plans.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a detailed complaints policy which meets requirements and sets out how formal and informal complaints can be made to the school.

Effectiveness of the early years foundation stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Parents say they are pleased with their children's education. Staff care about the children's needs and good relationships are forged with the children in their care; it is evident that children enjoy their time at school and they achieve well.

The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching is good and children mostly learn well in lessons because planning is informed through careful observation of the children. Staff demonstrate that they know how young children learn, for example, by asking open-ended questions and the children respond well with growing confidence and fluency. The children show, for example, a fondness for books, which they often self-select. Numeracy is carefully woven into the children's activities and the children show an increasing ability to solve problems, count and understand number operations. However, whilst the opportunities planned for the children's learning and development and their assessment are at least satisfactory, the children do not always have enough opportunities to make independent choices both in the inside and outside environments because the resources are not all of a good quality.

Outcomes overall are good. Most children make good progress towards the early learning goals in most areas of learning. Children's personal development is fostered well and their behaviour is good.

Leadership and management is satisfactory overall. Teaching staff in the Reception classes work well together with those in the nursery, sharing skills and experience, and demonstrate a keen commitment to ongoing improvements and training in the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents and carers are well informed about their children's progress and are encouraged to further support their children's learning at home. Systems for monitoring care and welfare are shared with

the nursery and these are of good quality. However, roles and responsibilities for monitoring the provision are unclear and the evaluation of the impact of provision on learning is underdeveloped.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises of and accommodation at schools (standards in part 5) and must:

- ensure that washrooms and changing rooms for pupils in the sports hall, including facilities for pupils with special needs and disability, take account of regulations 3 and 4 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23(j)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve the consistency of teaching and learning across the school, ensuring that pupils are more involved in their learning, that they are provided with clarity about what is expected of them and that resources and classroom displays provide greater stimulation to learners
- develop the use of assessment information to ensure that gaps in pupils' learning are clearly understood and are addressed in lesson planning
- in the Reception classes of the Early Years Foundation Stage improve the resources for learning and ensure there are clear roles and responsibilities for improving the provision.

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education			√	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			√	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs			√	
How well pupils make progress in their learning			√	

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		√		
The behaviour of pupils		√		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		√		
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage		√		
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage			√	
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage			√	
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage			√	

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Co-educational day school		
Date school opened	1991		
Age range of pupils	4–18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 55	Girls: 67	Total: 122
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 4	Girls:	Total: 4
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8,250		
Address of school	Mulberry House, Victoria Park Road Exeter, Devon, EX2 4NU		
Telephone number	01392 494919		
Email address	Bursar@MagdalenCourtSchool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr J Bushrod		
Proprietor	Mr & Mrs Jenner		