

Magdalen College School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122094
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	380401
Inspection dates	17–18 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Keith Brown

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1361
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hugh Cooper
Headteacher	Ian Colling
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2009
School address	Waynflete Avenue Brackley NN13 6FB
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Age group Serco in Confidence11–18

Inspection date(s) 17–18 October 2011

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 35 lessons and 34 teachers. Meetings were held with students, the headteacher, teachers, governors and the School Improvement Partner. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at safeguarding arrangements, as well as other information including development planning, policies, procedures and a range of students' books. A total of 87 questionnaires from parents and carers were scrutinised, together with 36 from staff and 124 from students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How accurate are the school's assessments of the progress made by students?
- Do all students know how well they are doing in their learning and how to improve further?
- How effective are middle leaders in developing curriculum provision and classroom practice in order to improve outcomes for students?

Information about the school

This large secondary school on a split-site campus serves the local community and surrounding villages. The school is a Specialist Mathematics and Computing College. Almost all students are White British. Some minority ethnic groups are represented, although the numbers in each group are small, and few students are learning English as an additional language. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free schools meals is well below average. The proportion of students that are identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, as is the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities. The proportion of students who join or leave the school at other than the expected times is about average. Among its awards, the school has the International Schools Award

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Magdalen College is a good school. Under the strong and purposeful leadership of the headteacher it provides a very caring and supportive environment for students and is an important part of its local community.

The curriculum has been radically overhauled and is now outstanding. One of the key features that now makes it outstanding is the effectiveness with which courses offered are tailored to the needs of the full range of students at the school. The practical vocational and work-related elements in particular make coming to school worthwhile for some students who had previously disengaged. This coupled with the outstanding partnership work with external agencies and partners have significantly contributed to the much improved attendance and reduction in persistent absence. Attendance is now high. The progress of most students is good and progress in English and mathematics is now accelerating rapidly. GCSE results are above the national average and are now on a strong upward trajectory.

There is effective support for those students who enter the school partway through their education, and for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Students behave well in lessons and around the school. They are courteous and co-operative with one another. The great majority of students responding to the questionnaire felt that they were safe in school.

Students know who to turn to for help, and are confident that any concerns they have will be taken seriously and dealt with effectively. The school provides good care, guidance and support. Students lead active lives and are clear about how to live a healthy lifestyle. They mix exceptionally well socially and have a clear understanding of what is right and wrong. The school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is outstanding overall. There is an excellent range of opportunities for spiritual development; for example, through the use of the school chapel which is widely used by many students for music activities and as a stimulus for art and photography. Students are highly thoughtful and reflective. They demonstrate mature insight into difficult issues in today's world as well as developing a strong sense of their own cultural backgrounds.

The sixth form is good and is improving due to strong leadership and management. There has been a well focused drive to reduce the differences in results between sixth form subjects.

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The school's senior leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the most important areas for improvement, and have drawn up appropriate plans to address them. The school has rightly focused on the quality of teaching which is now good and improving. In the outstanding teaching seen, students experienced rich and challenging tasks that fully engaged their interest and developed their understanding through active and independent learning. In those classes where teaching is satisfactory, teachers explain concepts clearly and plan activities for students, but do not always use assessment information to set work that is closely matched to students' abilities and needs. Most school leaders carefully and accurately monitor the progress of all groups of students and this contributes to the clear, upward pattern of improvement. However, not all school leaders demonstrate this systematic approach to analysing student data and implementing effective intervention strategies to secure rapid student progress. The school has made good progress since it was last inspected, demonstrating good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that leaders at all levels consistently analyse student data, put in place effective intervention to address the issues identified, and hence drive forward students' progress.
- Build on the strengths of teaching by:
 - broadening the range of strategies to promote active and independent learning
 - planning learning activities which more precisely match the needs and abilities of each student.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. Students achieve well and make good progress. The school's overall GCSE performance has been above the national average in the last two years. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C (including English and mathematics) has shown a sharp increase this year, with the now outstanding curriculum provision and excellent partnership arrangements making major contributions. Boys have performed less well than girls in the past but the school has put in place strategies that have narrowed the gender gap in GCSE examination results in 2011. In the school's specialist subjects, GCSE or equivalent performance in mathematics has been strong in the last two years and results in computing are improving.

Students with special educational needs/and or disabilities also make good progress. In lessons seen, these students learned quickly because tasks were closely matched to their prior attainment. Teaching assistants are deployed well and help students by demonstrating skills precisely, teaching specialist vocabulary and providing appropriate challenge and encouragement.

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The learning observed in most lessons was good. Students concentrate well at the start of lessons. They work together effectively, readily pooling their thoughts and developing ideas with the rest of their group. However, in a few lessons, students’ interest wanes and the pace of learning slows because parts of the lesson are too teacher directed with less opportunity for independent learning. Where active learning was best, for example in an outstanding Year 11 mathematics lesson, the teacher’s brisk and probing questioning ensured that a very close check was kept on students’ understanding of the use of negative numbers. This had the dual effect of keeping students well focused and any misunderstanding being corrected quickly.

Students make excellent progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Assemblies and tutorials promote a very strong sense of pride in the school community. This contributes very well to students’ keen understanding of their rights and responsibilities, and they are profoundly aware of how their actions can affect others. Students have developed excellent reflective skills through the outstanding opportunities provided by the curriculum. For example, Year 9 students recently spent a day contemplating the impact of the World Wars. Some were able to visit Ypres but those who stayed in school were given a similar opportunity for reflection at the school war memorial. Students enjoy taking on extra responsibility, for example by joining the school council or by coaching sports teams. They are becoming increasingly influential in issues that affect the wider community, such as the Swan Area Youth Council. Students’ good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles is reflected in the school’s Healthy School status. Students have developed a good knowledge of the world of work and of their future economic role in society by the time they reach Year 11.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

1

How effective is the provision?

The good working relationships established between staff and students build confidence. As a consequence, students have positive attitudes to learning. The common features that contribute to good and sometimes exceptional learning are underpinned by teachers’ high expectations and detailed planning to take account of the students’ individual learning needs. In the best lessons, pace and challenge are well matched to students’ abilities and the range of activities ensure that they make rapid progress. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to meet students’ needs, including those who find learning difficult or who have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The high proportion of good or better teaching observed by inspectors consistently exhibits strong subject knowledge and the imaginative use of resources. Teachers assess students’ progress accurately and their use of assessment to enhance learning is good overall. In some lessons, not enough use is made of this to match work to students’ needs. Work is marked regularly and the best practice provides clear, formative comments that help students make further progress.

The curriculum now meets students’ needs and aspirations outstandingly well. It builds very well on students’ previous learning and prepares them very thoroughly for the next stages in their education. Interactive whiteboards are used very effectively to enliven lessons and enhance learning. At Key Stage 3, a number of innovative cross-curricular projects provide memorable experiences for students and a valuable opportunity for them to take responsibility for their own learning. Their Frankenstein ‘Journey Journals’ provide a record of imaginative and high quality work, ranging across English, music, art and drama. Students say that they enjoy the extended learning days which directly support work related learning, community cohesion and citizenship. The Key Stage 4 curriculum provides an extensive range of courses to meet all students’ needs and allows for a valuable degree of personalisation. Excellent partnerships with local colleges enable the school to offer a wide range of vocational courses. The curriculum is extended by an outstanding range of art, music, dance and sport activities, as well as by visits and visitors. Such extra-curricular events contribute exceptionally well to students’ outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Students are confident that they will be well looked after, a view which is supported by parents and carers. Students’ needs are well known, and they receive good, individual support. As one Year 11 student noted: ‘I could never have spoken to you like this before - the school has really helped me to become more confident.’ Students are helped to settle in when they join the school and there is sensitively targeted support for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The school can point to clear examples of where it helps students to manage their own behaviour better, so that their progress in lessons is improving. Strong multi-agency

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work is significantly reducing the risk of exclusion and students with a history of disengagement are being successfully reintegrated into examination courses.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher is ably supported by the deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers and other leaders and together they are taking effective action to set high expectations, enhance provision and so raise attainment for all groups of students. Most staff are ambitious to achieve more, reflecting the success with which school leaders have embedded ambition. Most leaders effectively review teachers' planning, monitor the quality of lessons and scrutinise students' work. However, not all are as effective in driving forward new initiatives and securing further improvement, particularly in teaching and learning. The school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination well, and is tracking each student's progress towards challenging targets.

The governing body provides good strategic direction and challenge. The headteacher's informative reports, together with other pertinent information, enable governors to effectively monitor and challenge the school's leaders. Financial management is good and the school offers good value for money.

The school works closely with parents and carers, whose views are regularly sought and acted upon. Regular newsletters keep them abreast of activities in the school, and the school's website is friendly in tone and accessible. The school is totally committed to partnership working and takes a leading role in a range of activities, such as those provided by the South West Area of Northamptonshire 14-19 collaboration. Partnership activities now make an excellent contribution to curriculum provision and to the good progress of many students. Links and partnerships with agencies also ensure good and improving support for students who have specific needs and have contributed significantly to the improvements in attendance and reduction in persistent absence.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are robust and regularly reviewed, so that adults and students have a strong understanding of safety issues. Risk assessments are good and careful checks are made of the suitability of adults to work with children. Community cohesion is promoted well, following a thorough audit. Students have a good understanding of people from different backgrounds. Strong links have

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also been established around the world, and this has resulted in the school’s award of International School status.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students make good progress from their varying starting points, with many exceeding challenging targets in 2011. The school is rigorously addressing the variation in the performance of some subject areas. Actions taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning have had a positive impact on improving standards, particularly at AS level. Teaching is good overall and the use of assessment is rigorous. Students comment positively about prompt marking and feedback that helps them make good progress. Students take responsibility for monitoring their own progress against personal targets and collaborate well in helping each other to achieve. They speak highly of the academic support and guidance they receive, and the willingness of their teachers to provide support at an individual level. The curriculum is flexible and enables students to follow the most appropriate pathway for them. Students in the sixth form have good opportunities to contribute to the school, for example as heads of house and as mentors to Lower School students.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The sixth form centre is utilised well, providing students with a sense of identity and a high quality environment.

These are the grades for the sixth form

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Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

There was a much lower than normal level of response to the questionnaire. Parents and carers expressed strong support for the school and most said that their children are safe at school. A minority of parents and carers expressed concern that the school did not help them to support their child’s learning and that the school did not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. The inspection findings indicate that the school works closely with parents and carers and seeks their views. Feedback from parents and carers has been used improve the support to parents and carers to enable them to support their child's learning. Behaviour is managed well and inspection evidence indicates that behaviour is good both in lessons and around the school. A small minority of parents and carers expressed written concerns, but there was no common theme among them.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Magdalen College School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 87 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1361 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	21	24	56	64	6	7	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	23	26	57	66	7	8	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	32	37	45	52	6	7	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	28	49	56	9	10	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	22	25	54	62	8	9	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	18	21	48	55	17	20	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	17	55	63	10	11	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	18	21	56	64	6	7	2	2
The school meets my child’s particular needs	21	24	52	60	7	8	5	6
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	13	47	54	22	25	5	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	14	54	62	3	3	9	10
The school is led and managed effectively	18	21	50	57	10	11	7	8
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	19	22	52	60	11	13	4	5

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



19 October 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Magdalen College School, Brackley, NN13 6FB

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school and for completing the questionnaire with your views. A special thank you goes to those who met with us. Your views have been very helpful.

The school is providing a good education for you. Teaching is good and leads to you making good progress and reaching above average standards. You are happy and feel safe at school. Your attendance rate is much higher than in most schools. Well done and please keep it up. Most students behaved well in the lessons we visited. The curriculum is excellent and the school has developed some outstanding partnership work. You are gaining a wide range of skills which are preparing you well for the future. At the same time, you are developing into mature and aware citizens.

Your headteacher, staff and governors are determined for the school to become better. We have asked the headteacher to make sure that all the school's leaders consistently drive forward the recent improvements in examination results. We have asked your teachers to use their knowledge of how well you are doing to give you work that makes you think and is just the right level of difficulty. We have also asked them to give you the chance to become more involved in your own learning in all lessons. You can help by continuing to check your work carefully and by telling your teacher if you need them to explain some of the work in more detail.

I wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Keith Brown
Lead inspector

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