

Magdalen Court School

Victoria Park Road, Exeter, Devon EX2 4NU

Inspection dates

2–4 July 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The recently appointed senior leadership team (SLT) has been effective in improving the quality of education. However, some new systems are still too fragile to have consistently strong enough impact.
- The school development plan (SDP) is not sufficiently focused on the key priorities to raise achievement for pupils.
- Leaders' monitoring and evaluation skills are not good. Consequently, they are not holding teachers to account by identifying weaknesses quickly enough.
- Leaders' assessment and tracking systems are not embedded securely. This leads to confusion or ambiguity in target-setting for pupils.
- Teachers do not have consistently high expectations of the most able pupils. This holds some pupils back from reaching the standards of which they are capable.
- Teachers lack an understanding of the best principles for phonics and early reading. This still holds some pupils back, including in the secondary age range.
- Teachers do not make best use of their assessment information to match work to pupils' abilities. This impedes the progress that some make, particularly in reading and writing.
- Teachers do not plan next steps for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well enough. Consequently, some lessons are not matched well enough to meet their needs.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and trustees have responded positively to the previous inspection findings to strongly improve the school.
- Staff promote the school's aims and ethos passionately. This ensures that pupils behave well and are kind, tolerant and respectful.
- Staff work effectively to re-integrate pupils who have found education difficult elsewhere.
- Creative and practical activities promoted through the school's curriculum provide some high-quality learning and experiences for pupils.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the school's capacity and the effectiveness of all leaders and managers by:
 - revising the SDP, so that it focuses keenly on raising achievement for pupils who are not doing well enough academically, with precise milestones and time-scales to accomplish this
 - ensuring that monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are closely matched to the priorities of the SDP
 - improving leaders' professional skills, knowledge and understanding in checking the quality of teaching, in order to hold teachers stringently to account
 - agreeing and implementing a single process for tracking pupils' progress, particularly in key stages 3 and 4.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - developing teachers' skills and subject knowledge to implement a robust phonics and early reading programme
 - raising teachers' expectations of the most able pupils to reach the highest standards of which they are capable, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information to match work precisely to pupils' academic needs
 - implementing and evaluating high-quality plans for pupils with SEND to make the best possible progress in reading, writing and mathematics
 - raising achievement in writing, particularly for boys.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous standard inspection in November 2017, the trustees and headteacher have taken effective action to improve the school. As a result, all of the independent school standards are fully met and the school is providing an acceptable standard of education.
- Following her appointment, the headteacher has worked closely with trustees to secure the necessary improvements. In particular, the focus on improving the quality of teaching in the primary classes is showing discernible impact in raising pupils' achievement.
- Trustees have ensured that there is now a fully functional SLT and a recently appointed special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) in the school. This team is determined to make a difference. However, due to the recent nature of its work, there is still some fragility in the implementation of expectations and systems to get the best for pupils.
- Leaders' expectations and intentions are not articulated clearly enough in the SDP. They also lack precise or measurable milestones and time-scales to secure the best academic outcomes for pupils in the school, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Leaders are now proactive in monitoring and evaluating key aspects of the school's work. For example, they undertake lesson observations and learning walks to check the quality of teaching in different subjects. However, these activities are not focused well enough on the key priorities through the SDP. Consequently, leaders are not identifying some weaknesses quickly enough, including in pupils' achievement in reading.
- Despite the recent monitoring and improvements seen in teaching and learning, leaders' skills and knowledge in knowing what to look for through monitoring activities are still too variable. This means leaders do not consistently hold teachers firmly to account.
- Leaders have not ensured that their expectations for a single and agreed process for tracking pupils' progress are clearly understood and implemented. This leads to confusion or ambiguity, and, in the worse cases, fails to identify those pupils who may be able to achieve more, such as those on the cusp of gaining a higher grade at GCSE.
- However, leaders have now introduced systems, including 'data meetings', to identify any pupils at risk of falling behind. They use baseline information, such as reading ages and scaled scores, to check pupils' progress. Leaders have subsequently gathered and now use a range of useful information to identify when pupils are not making enough progress.
- Leaders ensure that information about pupils' academic progress is interrogated on a half-termly basis. This leads to effective intervention and targeted support activities to enable pupils who need to catch up to gain ground. These systems are securing the improvements necessary for some pupils.
- Leaders have a clear rationale and intent for their curriculum ('Learning through doing'). This provides a range of practical and creative activities for pupils to re-engage with learning and promote awe, wonder and excitement. Consequently, pupils' achievement and their enthusiasm for subjects, including art, design and technology, music and physical education (PE), are good. This aspect of the school's curriculum is well

considered to ensure that pupils learn independence and take responsibility for their learning. For some, this is the key to getting them back into education in a meaningful and productive way.

- Further enrichment activities, including clubs and visits, such as to Exeter cathedral and underground tunnels, also promote pupil engagement and learning. Pupils enjoy taking additional responsibilities, such as being school councillors. These contribute well towards pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders ensure that there is a wide suite of study options for GCSE and A level in key stages 4 and 5. Pupils can follow particular areas of interest, such as through gaining a GCSE in agriculture. The appointment of a specialist teacher to promote high-quality careers advice, including work experience, is paying dividends. Pupils and post-16 students benefit from a range of tailored opportunities to support further educational or employment goals.
- Parents typically endorse the work of leaders. The overwhelming majority feel that their child is making strong progress, particularly socially and emotionally, and that this has a positive impact on their achievement.

Governance

- The proprietor and trustees have responded positively to previous weaknesses identified through Ofsted inspections. They have funded a full staffing re-structure to extend the school's leadership by creating an SLT. This includes the headteacher and assistant headteacher, as well as a primary and secondary lead. This team is now ensuring improved capacity to secure the necessary improvements.
- The proprietor and trustees have sought high-quality external advice, for example through the Exeter Consortium, to help identify and address weaknesses in the school. This has been invaluable in providing effective support and peer mentoring for the headteacher to help raise the quality of teaching and learning.
- Trustees take a keen interest and are active in the school. They now use their knowledge of the school to hold the headteacher and other leaders to account. For example, their termly meetings scrutinise the headteacher's reports, and they also hold direct meetings with school leaders to gain a first-hand view to support their self-evaluation.
- Trustees and leaders have an accurate view of the school. They know that there is more to do to ensure that pupils' achievement and pupils' outcomes are good. However, their comment to the inspector that: 'We had to step up!' is borne out through the improvements seen since the last inspection.
- Trustees understand the medical, developmental and behavioural difficulties of many of the pupils in the school. As a result, they have taken steps to increase the school's ability to manage these. For example, the recent additions of both the SENCo and the inclusion and welfare manager (IWM) have brought valuable knowledge and expertise. These are already proving effective in providing effective support for some of the most vulnerable pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Leaders promote a strong culture of safeguarding. Their systems for staff recruitment, training and induction are robust. Consequently, staff are vigilant and show a keen awareness and understanding of child protection matters.
- Leaders and staff make timely referrals and take prompt action to keep pupils safe. They work effectively with other agencies and external partners to ensure pupils' safety and well-being.
- Pupils say that they feel safe. They are happy at the school and find Magdalen Court to be a place where they feel understood, valued and appreciated. Pupils know what bullying is. They are adamant that it does not occur in this school. However, they also have great trust and confidence in school staff to intervene swiftly should bullying occur. Pupils told the inspector who the designated safeguarding lead is and who they could contact, including Childline, if they had any worries.
- Staff promote pupils' emotional and mental health as well as their physical well-being. Staff interact positively and show care, so that pupils overcome personal challenges, including clinical diagnoses such as of anxiety and autism. This helps pupils to settle and feel safe in different situations at home, in the school and in the community.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teachers do not have consistently high expectations of the most able pupils. This prevents some pupils from reaching the standards of which they are capable, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers lack an understanding of the best principles for teaching phonics and early reading development. For example, pupils have books that do not match their phonic knowledge, and assessments are not used well enough to close gaps speedily for some pupils. This holds some pupils back and reduces the amount of progress they make, including when they are in the secondary class.
- Teachers do not make the best use of any assessment information that they now have available to them. They do not match work or implement targets consistently well, so that some work, at times, is either too easy or too difficult for pupils.
- Teachers and leaders do not have personal plans in place for pupils with SEND. As a result, pupils make inconsistent progress, because next steps or milestones are not clearly understood or communicated. This impedes progress in terms of pupils' academic development and readiness for the next stage in their learning.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have positive relationships with pupils. This enables pupils to settle quickly and feel comfortable in lessons. Pupils talk passionately about their teachers, saying, for example: 'The teachers here are the best in the world!'
- The quality of teaching is improving. Teachers' subject knowledge now provides some challenge, and there are times when teachers ask skilful questions to deepen pupils' understanding. For example, in primary mathematics, pupils are asked to explain or justify their thinking, which helps pupils to consolidate or deepen their knowledge.
- Teachers, particularly those in the primary classes, make good use of the physical environment to promote interest and enjoyment in lessons. For example, the outdoor spaces are inviting and organised for pupils to apply their learning meaningfully in

different contexts or situations.

- Teachers and other staff are skilled in understanding the pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs. Consequently, teachers plan lessons to engage and motivate pupils, including in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching in some creative subjects, such as art and PE, as well as through off-site visits (for example, in history), is good. In these lessons, pupils explore different themes and apply what they have learned in a variety of contexts. These activities engage pupils and provide further depth and meaning across subjects.
- One-to-one and other recently introduced interventions are supporting some identified pupils to receive the essential support they need to start catching up.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff care for every pupil and take the time to understand each pupil's particular needs, including those with SEND or complex medical diagnoses. The highly inclusive work of the school ensures that pupils are motivated to contribute in lessons and at other times throughout the school day.
- Pupils enjoy having different roles and responsibilities to help with the running of the school. This also prepares them well for the next stage in life and their education. For example, their roles as school councillors, librarians and active members of the gardening club help in developing the school.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school and in lessons. They are keenly aware of the challenges that others face. They show great humility, compassion and understanding to help each other. Pupils understand the harm done by ridicule or teasing, and so make every effort to look after each other.
- Leaders' work to promote British values is effective. Pupils have a deep understanding of British values and their importance to citizenship in modern British society. Pupils talk knowledgeably about different religions and cultures, including the main world faiths. They understand the importance of individual liberty, for example describing this as 'freedom to be yourself'.
- However, pupils' overall welfare and their preparedness for the next stage in their education are affected when they do not attain the academic standards that they reasonably should achieve, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Leaders ensure that independent careers advice and work experience are well managed. This provides pupils in key stages 3 and 4, as well as sixth-form students, with valuable activities to develop their individual interests for further education and/or employment.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders and other staff promote the school's aims and ethos with determination and passion. This ensures that pupils behave well and are kind, tolerant and respectful at

school.

- Staff work proactively to engage and re-integrate those pupils who have been disaffected by education elsewhere. As a result, pupils gain confidence and self-esteem to 'give things a go'. Pupils learn to trust themselves and each other, through a mutually supportive and positive environment.
- The effective promotion of equalities prepares pupils well for the next stage in their lives. For example, key stage 2 pupils spoke to the inspector about respecting others of different sexual orientation and preferences. Pupils also show tolerance and care towards those who have disabilities. This leads to an inclusive and caring school community.
- Pupils attend well and like coming to the school. Attendance is above the national average, including for those with an EHC plan or who are in the care of the local authority. Those placed through the local authority also attend well. There have been no exclusions.
- The inclusion team, comprising the headteacher, SENCo and IWM, has introduced an effective system of behaviour management. This is based on understanding the needs of the pupils and providing positive activities to reinforce good behaviour. The introduction of the sanctuary room also helps pupils to manage their own thoughts and feelings effectively.
- There are times, however, when inconsistencies in teachers' expectations do not ensure that pupils take pride in their work. When this happens, the standard of work deteriorates, and pupils do not produce the quality work of which they are capable.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Despite ongoing improvements, the progress of pupils across the school remains too variable, including for students in the sixth form. This is particularly evident in pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The progress of some pupils, including those with SEND, is not good, particularly in key aspects of reading, writing and mathematics. For example, there are still too many weaknesses in pupils' use of punctuation and grammar in writing.
- Pupils' phonic knowledge and reading skills are not developed well enough. This impedes their progress and ability to read independently and with meaning. This includes pupils with an EHC plan, as well as other pupils in the secondary class.
- Standards in writing, particularly for boys, are weak. Common errors in structure, syntax, punctuation and grammar reduce the quality of work and prevent too many from producing the higher quality work of which they are capable.
- The most able pupils are not routinely stretched or challenged to ensure that they reach the highest standards of which they are capable across the school and in different subjects.
- However, when pupils leave the school, most go on to appropriate further education, employment or training, including sixth-form students. Pupils, including those with an EHC plan, are well supported to take personalised next steps towards independence and adulthood.
- Pupils benefit from a well-developed range of subjects and experiences, including careers

advice, work experience and breadth to their GCSE offer. For example, pupils can study subjects as diverse as a GCSE in agriculture. This enables pupils to complete studies in areas of personal interest.

- Pupils make good progress in the social and emotional aspects of learning. These are further developed through high-quality opportunities provided in subjects other than English and mathematics. For example, in PE, pupils develop interpersonal skills, such as teamwork and communication, as well as improve core physical development towards meeting targets on EHC plans.
- Pupils enjoy and achieve well in other subjects, such as design and technology, art and music. For example, pupils have crafted high-quality jewellery, which has been displayed publicly. Creative subjects and opportunities are used well to promote interest and further pupils' enjoyment in education.

School details

Unique reference number	113623
DfE registration number	878/6045
Inspection number	10090662

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

Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	42
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	John Jenner Snr
Headteacher	Sarah Wrightson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,000 – £12,000 (without bursary)
Telephone number	01392 494 919
Website	www.MagdalenCourtSchool.co.uk
Email address	office@magdalencourtschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–30 November 2017

Information about this school

- Magdalen Court School is a co-educational, non-selective day school registered for 250 pupils aged between five and 18 years of age.
- Over half of the pupils on the school's roll have an EHC plan and are placed through Devon local authority.
- The school's previous standard inspection was in November 2017. At this time, it was deemed to be inadequate. A subsequent progress monitoring inspection (PMI) in November 2018 continued to find some unmet standards.
- The Department for Education (DfE) served a notice to improve to the proprietor in February 2018.

- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed pupils in a range of subjects in all classes. In addition, the inspector looked at pupils' work and information kept by the school about pupils' learning.
- The inspector held discussions with pupils, staff and leaders throughout the inspection, including the SENCo, headteacher, and primary and secondary leads.
- The inspector met with the proprietor and two trustees. He scrutinised key plans, including the school development plan, summary self-evaluation and programmes of study. He also reviewed the school's curriculum plan and other information provided by the school.
- The inspector scrutinised documentation relating to safeguarding, behaviour, exclusions and attendance. School policies and documentation, including risk assessments and EHC plans, were also examined.
- The inspector took account of the views of members of staff who completed Ofsted's questionnaire for staff and considered the views of 19 parents expressed through Parent View, as well as speaking directly through telephone conversations and meeting parents and carers face to face. Parental views expressed through the free-text facility were also considered as part of the inspection.
- This inspection was commissioned by the DfE. It combined a PMI with a full standard inspection, in particular to evaluate previously unmet standards in paragraphs 2, 3, 4 and 34. The school's action plan was re-evaluated as part of this inspection.

Inspection team

Stewart Gale, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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