

Inspection of Magdalen Court School

Victoria Park Road, Exeter, Devon EX2 4NU

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 November 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are very happy at Magdalen Court School. They enjoy playing sports with their friends at lunchtime and breaktime. For example, pupils play badminton, hockey and table football well together. They also have many opportunities to practise their manual dexterity through making crafts such as bracelets. Pupils relish the outdoor education lessons. They develop their physical health and understanding of the natural world through visits to Dartmoor.

Pupils have strong relationships with staff. This helps them to build their confidence and enjoy learning. Pupils state that other pupils are kind, helpful and respectful. Pupils can define bullying accurately. They state that bullying is not a problem and that when it occurs, it is resolved by staff immediately. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. However, pupils often lose focus and become distracted when the lessons are not well planned.

Pupils enjoy listening to teachers reading stories. However, they do not read regularly and with understanding. Some pupils who struggle with reading do not receive the support they require.

Some pupils receive bespoke careers guidance. However, it is not systematic, and many pupils are unsure of their next steps beyond school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The new headteacher and deputy headteacher have inspired the staff. They are unanimous in feeling proud to work at the school. Through their strong vision and understanding of education, they have begun to revise the curriculum. However, it is early days. One pupil echoed the views of many when she stated, 'The school used to be like a youth club but now it is a school.' However, leaders have not communicated effectively these positive changes to parents. Some parents express negative views of the school and the way it safeguards pupils. Following concerns that the proprietor failed to safeguard pupils well enough, work has been conducted, with support from Devon County Council and a local trust, to ensure there are strong safeguarding systems in place.

The focus for leaders now is ensuring that all pupils learn a well-structured curriculum that meets their specific needs. Leaders have designed a clear curriculum that will enable pupils to learn effectively in some subject areas. For example, the mathematics curriculum is well thought out. However, in some areas of the curriculum, it is still in its infancy. Many teachers are new to the school and do not adapt their teaching to meet the needs of pupils sufficiently well. Some teachers, on the other hand, provide highly effective personalised support to pupils enabling them to learn well. Pupils value the changes to the curriculum.

Leaders have established assessments for English, reading and mathematics to check what pupils know. This information has informed the development of these

respective curriculum areas. For example, leaders have recently introduced a phonics-based reading strategy. However, in other areas of the curriculum, teachers do not have an accurate understanding of what pupils know and do not know. This hampers the design and teaching of the curriculum in many areas. Currently, the headteacher and deputy headteacher design, review and monitor the development of the curriculum. A local trust provides additional capacity to develop subject leadership, but this is in its infancy.

Leaders and staff provide effective support for pupils' emotional well-being. Pupils feel well protected. Pupils describe the school as 'a big family' and a 'sanctuary'. They value the strong relationships they have with staff. By enabling pupils to learn empathy, confidence and how to communicate with others, pupils are able to access the wider world. For example, pupils visit Dawlish by train and Exeter Christmas market which helps to build their confidence about interacting with the wider world. However, the support for pupils in making informed choices about further education, apprenticeships and the world of work is not as effective.

Through a revised behaviour policy, leaders have created a calm and harmonious environment throughout the school. However, pupils lose focus and are not motivated to learn where the curriculum is not taught and designed well. Additionally, pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Together with Devon County Council and a local trust, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have established effective safeguarding systems. They take appropriate action to keep pupils safe. They know the pupils and their families very well. Staff are well trained and receive frequent updates about safeguarding. Staff keep a very close eye on pupils as they know that many are vulnerable or at risk of exploitation. As a result, leaders have ensured that pupils learn how to keep safe when online.

Leaders ensure that appropriate background checks are carried out on adults working within the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The curriculum is not well designed in many subject areas. Teachers do not consistently consider the learning needs of pupils when teaching the curriculum. Assessment information about what pupils know is not consistently gathered to inform the design and teaching of the curriculum. Consequently, pupils do not learn well in many subjects. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum enables pupils to develop progressively more complex knowledge. Leaders need to ensure that teachers adapt learning to meet pupils' needs. Leaders need to ensure that

effective assessment systems are in place to ensure that pupils do not have gaps in their knowledge.

- Many pupils struggle with reading. The reading curriculum is in its infancy and not yet well established. Consequently, pupils do not receive consistently effective support to help them improve their reading. Leaders must ensure that an effective reading programme is implemented consistently across the school.
- The programme to support pupils making choices about further education, apprenticeships and work is not well designed and implemented across the school. Many pupils are unclear about their next steps beyond school. Leaders need to establish an effective programme across the school to enable pupils to make informed choices about further education, apprenticeships and work.
- Pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should. Consequently, pupils are not learning as well as they could. Leaders need to ensure that pupils and parents understand that if pupils are not in school, they are missing vital learning. Leaders should ensure that pupils attend school regularly.
- Communications between the school and parents is not strong. Some parents have negative views about the school and feel that it is unsafe. Leaders must ensure regular communication between parents and carers and the school to enable them to have a voice and see the improvements that the current headteacher and deputy headteacher have begun to implement.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	113623
DfE registration number	878/6045
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10230027
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
Number of part-time pupils	5
Proprietor	John Jenner Snr
Headteacher	Rowena Schofield
Annual fees (day pupils)	£32,500
Telephone number	01392 494919
Website	www.MagdalenCourtSchool.co.uk
Email address	n.England@magdalencourtschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 to 4 July 2019

Information about this school

- The majority of pupils are placed at the school by Devon County Council.
- Most pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school uses one registered and one unregistered alternative education provision.

Information about this inspection

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, alongside representatives from Devon County Council and a local trust.
- An inspector held a discussion with two members of the trust board.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, science and personal, social and health education. This meant that, in each subject, inspectors met with senior and curriculum leaders, talked to pupils, visited lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at pupils' books.
- Inspectors met with staff to consider their views.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding records, including the single central record of recruitment checks on staff.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents who responded to the confidential questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. They evaluated the views of staff and pupils from the Ofsted online questionnaires.

Inspection team

Susan Aykin, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Goddard

Ofsted Inspector

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