

Magdalen College School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122094
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	327637
Inspection date	19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	David Martin HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1453
Sixth form	291
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hugh Cooper
Headteacher	Ian Colling
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
School address	Waynflete Avenue Brackley NN13 6FB
Telephone number	01280 846300
Fax number	01280 704953

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- how effectively the school tracks the progress of individuals, groups and cohorts of students, particularly those in Key Stage 4
- the consistency of target-setting, marking and feedback for all students as they move through the school
- the impact that middle leaders have on developing classroom practice, curriculum provision and learning outcomes
- how effectively senior managers and governors provide a strategic direction for the school and hold managers to account.

Evidence was gathered from the school's data, lesson observations including joint observations by inspectors and members of the senior leadership team, students' work and school documentation. There were meetings with students and staff including the school's senior leadership team and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and some of these aspects have been included where appropriate in the report

Description of the school

The school is the only secondary school in an expanding market town. Although relatively advantaged socially and economically overall, the community also has significant areas of disadvantage. Selective and private education in the neighbouring area has some impact on the school population. The proportion of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average, but is higher in more recent cohorts. The great majority of students are White British and the school welcomes a small number of pupils with a range of other ethnic heritages. Significant numbers of students join the sixth form from outside the local area.

The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing. Ancient links with Magdalen College, Oxford, have been preserved, as is seen in some lovely old buildings on one site of the split-site campus.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

- Magdalen College School is a good school that has improved steadily since the last inspection and has a good capacity to continue to improve further in the future. The main reasons for this improvement lie in the outstanding quality of school self-evaluation and the excellent use of data and assessment information, an area for improvement at the last inspection. This has enabled senior and middle leaders to identify relatively weaker areas of school work and put in place intervention strategies. These strategies have been invariably successful in improving provision and outcomes for students. This is particularly true in the specialist areas of the school's work, some of which have been turned from weaknesses at the last inspection into current strengths. It is seen most clearly in the outstanding curriculum provision, which is superbly matched to students' interests and abilities. Although particularly good in the main school, plans to extend the already good provision in the sixth form are expected to provide even further opportunities for students in the school. These improvements have come about because the governors have ambitious, long-term plans for the school. They have increased their first-hand knowledge of the working of the school through subject links and the better holding of school leaders to account. The headteacher and senior leadership team have provided the vision and drive to turn this ambition into effective action. The senior team brings a wealth of complementary talents and expertise to school improvement. Good planning, based on an unwavering monitoring, evaluation and review of the school's work, has led to sustainable, and steady but sure, improvements in all areas. Middle leaders increasingly feel empowered and accountable for their areas of responsibility. Many contribute strongly to shaping improvements, although there is still inconsistency in middle leadership that leads to more variable performance across subjects than the school is prepared to accept. Senior leaders have identified these weaknesses and know how they intend to tackle them. Data are managed expertly at a whole-school level and students are tracked very carefully. Departments have been given responsibility for tracking in their own areas and feed information into the school system. At best, this is highly effective, but is another area where the school is striving for even greater consistency.

Leaders and managers, through self-evaluation, have strengthened the provision made for students. The curriculum has great breadth and is personalised to offer equal and appropriate opportunities for all. Amongst the many outstanding features are: the 'flexible learning centre' for those at risk of disaffection; the developing land-based, environmental qualifications and diploma courses; extensive tailored information and communication technology (ICT) courses; the 'creative curriculum' at Key Stage 3; and the many ways in which the school is working with a wide range of partners as a 'change school'. Many of these developments are recognised as best practice well beyond the local area. Teaching is good overall and there is some outstanding practice. Again, there is too much variability at present and some teaching that the students do not find inspiring. They stated to inspectors a preference for active learning and group activity. The management team is proactive in addressing known weaknesses through 'teaching and learning communities'. This enables the best practice to be disseminated and has had a significant impact on sharing teaching approaches between subject areas. Marking is again variable in quality, as was noted by some parents in their responses. Some teachers do not give sufficient attention to the presentation of work or helpful feedback to students on how to improve.

Because of improvements in provision, the outcomes for students have improved, particularly in their academic achievement. Their personal development remains good, as at the time of the last inspection. Results at all key stages have progressively improved since the last inspection. Standards attained, right across the school, are above the national average. They were well above average in science at Key Stage 3 in 2008. Standards in mathematics and English were not as strong at GCSE in 2008, but interventions made in these key subjects indicate that results are on track to be significantly better in 2009. The school recognises that reducing the variability in standards between subjects at GCSE is the key to further improvement. Standards in the sixth form are also above average, but again with some variability between subjects. The progress that students make from their different starting points is good. This is particularly true at Key Stage 3 over the last few years, and this improvement can now also be seen at Key Stage 4. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make equally good progress, and the school has narrowed the gap between the performance of boys and girls, which was an issue at the last inspection. The progress made by students in the sixth form is good, and is exceptionally strong in some subject areas. The school has been successful in meeting challenging targets, including in its specialist subject areas.

The day-to-day pastoral care and support is recognised by students as a key strength of the school. The school provides well for their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The great majority of students respond positively and form excellent relationships with teachers and each other. Some parents and students told us that there is some inconsistency in the approaches to managing behaviour, resulting in a small minority who do not have such positive attitudes to their education. Inspectors saw no disruption to the lessons observed, although there was some minor off-task behaviour. Students say that they would like more of a voice in the school and to have appropriate channels through which to have a say about how the school could be improved further. Attendance remains stubbornly average despite the best efforts of the school to engage with parents and learners about the impact of absence on attainment. Students do know how to be healthy and stay safe, and large numbers thoroughly enjoy the wide range of activities that the school offers. The school's safeguarding procedures are robust. The school has a sound plan to develop community cohesion, although the faith element of this plan is less strong. The extent to which the school reaches out to the local and wider community and draws the community into school is exceptional. This can be seen through the community use of sports facilities, musical and drama productions and an array of other activities. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education and their future lives.

Parents and carers clearly have high expectations of the school and many raised issues in their responses. Some of these were discussed anonymously with senior leaders, but are mainly issues that require to be pursued directly with the school so that they can be resolved. The school is reviewing the way it communicates with parents and carers. It is seeking to become more proactive in making others aware of the many and varied successes of its students.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students in the sixth form attain standards that are above average. The progress that they make from their different starting points is good, and in some subjects is outstanding. These include fine art, art textiles, Spanish, sport, physical education and health and social care. Achievement in the specialist subjects of mathematics and ICT has also improved significantly. Teaching is good and assessment information is used well to set targets and to track progress. The range of courses matches students' interests well and is being expanded as part of a

partnership collaboration. The strengths in management are similar to those in the main school. Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate, the curriculum is well designed and data are used well to support intervention. The school has developed a more cohesive programme of support for the transition to higher education and other training routes in response to student feedback. Personal development in the sixth form is strong, as in the main school, but, again, students are not given sufficient responsibility and do not have a strong voice in how the school develops.

What the school should do to improve further

- Act upon on current monitoring, evaluation and review findings in order to achieve even greater consistency in: -teaching and learning, including marking and feedback to students
-middle management effectiveness.
- Increase the involvement of all students by giving more opportunities for the 'student voice' to be heard and creating opportunities for them to take greater responsibility in the school.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

20 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Magdalen College School, Brackley, Northants, NN13 6FB

I am writing to tell you what we found when we visited your school recently. I would first of all like to thank all the students who talked to us about the school and their work. You generally told us that you enjoy school, particularly the positive relationships that you have with staff and the many opportunities that are provided for you.

We agree that your school is a good school. The results that students achieve at the end of Year 9 and 11, and in the sixth form, have been steadily improving and are above those found in most schools. This means that you make good academic progress as you move through the school. You also develop into well-rounded adults because of the good care and support that you receive. There are many reasons for this, but these are the most important.

- The adults who lead your school check very carefully on its work in all areas. They take successful action to improve relative weaknesses for your benefit.
- Your progress is very carefully tracked and those in danger of falling behind are helped to achieve their potential.
- The curriculum offered to you is exciting and broad, enabling you to take courses that are well suited to your needs and interests. Even good schools can improve, and the governors and staff at your school are ambitious in what they want to provide for you in the future. We listened carefully to what you and your parents told us and have agreed with some of the things that you say might be improved. We have asked the staff at the school to:
 - seek ways to achieve greater consistency in teaching and learning, including the marking and feedback you receive
 - give more opportunities for you to take responsibility and for them to listen carefully to your views about how the school could be improved.

I would like to wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

David Martin Her Majesty's Inspector