

Inspection of Magdalen College School

Waynflete Avenue, Brackley, Northamptonshire NN13 6FB

Inspection dates:	23 and 29 April 2025
The quality of education	Inadequate
Behaviour and attitudes	Inadequate
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Sixth-form provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher and accounting officer of this school is Tom Hollis. This school is a single-academy trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired Ben Naylor.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has failed to provide pupils with an acceptable standard of education. Staff do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve or how they should behave. Pupil outcomes at the end of key stage 4 are too low. Staff have higher expectations of students in the sixth form, and most benefit from a well-delivered curriculum. These students achieve well in public examinations.

In class, some pupils disrupt the learning of others. Too often, pupils do not engage well or meaningfully with learning activities. Too many pupils are late to lessons or are absent from lessons. They miss out on learning. During unstructured times, most pupils conduct themselves well.

Most pupils feel safe in school. They know they have an adult to talk to if they are worried. However, pupils frequently hear other pupils using discriminatory and derogatory language. Pupils do not report this as they feel the school will not do anything about it.

The school has not ensured pupils' physical safety on site. Some areas remain unsafe, and pupils have gained access to them. Sometimes, staff leave pupils unsupervised in classrooms. The school has not taken appropriate action to secure the premises.

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

The school has developed a broad and ambitious curriculum for pupils. It has set out the key knowledge and vocabulary that pupils should learn.

Nevertheless, the school has not ensured that staff deliver the curriculum effectively in key stages 3 and 4. In most subjects, staff do not check pupils' understanding adequately. This means staff are unaware of any gaps in learning pupils may have. As a result, these gaps are neither addressed nor resolved. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, do not progress through the curriculum as well as they should.

Staff do not set high enough expectations for the quality of the work the pupils produce. Pupils do not complete work to an appropriate standard. Staff fail to ensure that pupils use correct punctuation or spell key words correctly. This means pupils are not developing their writing as well as they could.

The school accurately identifies pupils' additional needs. It provides extra help to some pupils who need to improve their reading. However, there is not a school wide approach to support the development of pupils' early literacy. This affects how some pupils are learning the intended curriculum and how they communicate in writing across different subjects.

The school provides staff with information about how to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, most staff do not use this information well. They do not routinely adapt their teaching to support these pupils. Pupils with SEND do not achieve as well as they should.

Sixth-form staff typically deliver the curriculum well. Students in the sixth form achieve well in most subjects. However, in some subjects, students lack appropriate resources and are taught by staff who do not have the necessary subject expertise. Students do not achieve as well in these subjects.

The school has not ensured that staff address behaviour issues effectively. Often, staff do not emphasise the importance of pupils completing learning activities well. Pupils show a lack of engagement in learning. At times, poor behaviour disrupts the learning of others. This means pupils do not learn as well as they should. Pupils report that teachers are not always fair when dealing with conduct issues. The school does not provide adequate support for staff in managing poor behaviour. Many staff have lost confidence in how the school deals with behaviour.

The school's actions to reduce truancy and lateness to lessons have been ineffective. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is too low. The school has not done enough to support these pupils in improving their attendance.

The school has developed a clear programme to support pupils' broader development. Pupils learn how to stay safe online, adopt healthy lifestyles and understand different religions. However, the school's personal development programme is not implemented consistently well. This means that pupils do not develop a strong understanding of important concepts such as fundamental British values and equality. The school provides pupils with opportunities to learn about different careers. Sixth-form students learn about the world of work, apprenticeships, and higher education. This prepares them well for their next steps.

The school has not ensured that part-time timetables are used appropriately. Some pupils have remained on these programmes too long without a clear plan to increase their time in school. Additionally, the school has not guaranteed that pupils who attend alternative provision receive appropriate support. Some of these pupils are not gaining relevant qualifications.

The school and those responsible for governance do not have an accurate understanding of the extent of the school's weaknesses. Consequently, they have been slow to address these shortcomings. Where action has been taken, it has been ineffective. For instance, in securing good standards of behaviour. Some staff feel unsupported and believe that school leaders do not listen to their concerns.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

The school does not manage site access effectively. For example, it does not require sixth-form students to sign out of school when they leave for breaks. This means the school is unaware of which students are on or off site at any given time. The school has not taken appropriate action to ensure that access to the site is routinely managed and supervised.

There are occasions when pupils are left unsupervised in classrooms. Furthermore, some pupils have gained access to areas of the school that should have been closed due to health and safety concerns, posing a risk to their safety.

The school has ensured that staff are well-trained and know how to report concerns. It has completed the necessary safeguarding checks for all staff working at the school. However, in some alternative provisions, the school has not checked the suitability of adults working with children. The school's oversight of the use of alternative provision is not consistently rigorous.

The school maintains accurate records of pupils' safeguarding concerns. Staff act quickly to ensure pupils get the support they need to stay safe. The school works well with external agencies to provide appropriate help to any pupil in need.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, do not achieve well, especially at the end of key stage 4. This is because expectations are too low, and the curriculum is not implemented effectively. The school has not ensured that staff check pupils' understanding thoroughly. As a result, gaps in learning and misconceptions remain unaddressed, preventing pupils from making the progress they should. The school should ensure that the curriculum is implemented consistently well, so that pupils achieve better outcomes. Staff should systematically check pupils' understanding to identify and resolve any gaps in their learning.
- The school's approaches to supporting pupils' literacy knowledge and skills are not consistently effective. Too often pupils do not get the help they need. Staff do not routinely ensure that pupils use correct punctuation and spelling. This affects how pupils develop fluency in writing across the curriculum. The school should ensure that a suitable curriculum is in place for writing and that staff implement it well.
- Staff do not adapt their teaching to help pupils with SEND access the curriculum. As a result, these pupils do not achieve as well as they should. The school should ensure that teachers know how to use strategies to support pupils with SEND in accessing the curriculum effectively.
- Pupils do not behave well in lessons because expectations are inconsistent. Recent changes to the school's policy and approach have exacerbated the problem. As a result, staff do not feel well supported by leaders, and too often, pupils do not engage well in their learning. Low-level disruption frequently interrupts learning in class. The school should ensure that pupils behave consistently well, and that staff receive adequate support to manage poor behaviour.
- Pupils frequently hear discriminatory language, including racist and homophobic slurs. They do not always report this because they lack confidence that leaders will resolve the issue. The school should ensure that everyone understands its approach to dealing

with discriminatory language and pupils feel confident that it will be dealt with it effectively.

- Too many pupils truant and arrive late to lessons. This causes them to miss out on learning. The school has not taken effective action to resolve this issue. The school should implement effective systems to reduce truancy and lateness.
- Access to and egress from the site are not managed well. The school is unaware of which sixth-form students are on or off site at any given time. Pupils can access unsafe areas of the school, posing a risk to their safety. The school should ensure that it manages the access and exits to the school site effectively and prevents pupils from accessing unsafe areas.
- The school does not properly oversee or check the alternative provisions it uses or adjust the use of part-time timetables for pupils. It does not verify whether the staff at providers are suitable to work with children. Some pupils in alternative provision are not gaining meaningful qualifications and those on reduced timetables have no clear plan as to how they will return to accessing full-time provision. The school should assess the suitability of alternative providers, confirms that provision meets pupils' needs and guarantees that pupils gain relevant qualifications, including those currently on part-time programmes.
- Leaders and those responsible for governance do not accurately understand the school's weaknesses. They have been too slow to address issues relating to the quality of education, pupils' behaviour and site security. The school should ensure that it has an accurate understanding of what needs to be improved so these issues can be addressed. Governance should be strengthened to ensure that leaders are held to account.

HMCI strongly recommends that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers. The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium](#)

[funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	139158
Local authority	West Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10379580
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1348
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	195
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ben Naylor
Headteacher	Tom Hollis
Website	www.magdalen.northants.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	24 January 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher was appointed in September 2023.
- The deputy headteachers were appointed in January 2022 and September 2023.
- The school is a single academy trust, Magdalen College School Brackley Academy Trust.
- The school uses seven unregistered providers and one registered alternative provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection started on 23 April 2025. It was paused in line with '[Ofsted inspections and visits: Deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence policy](#)'. Inspectors returned on 29 April 2025 to complete the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- The lead inspector met with trustees, including the chair of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, design and technology, modern foreign languages, English and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum and visited lessons in some other subjects.
- Inspectors visited registration sessions.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from a range of year groups, including pupils with SEND. Inspectors spoke with pupils at break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at break and lunchtimes.

Inspection team

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