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24 November 2025

Tom Hollis
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Dear Mr Hollis

Special measures monitoring inspection of Magdalen College School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 21 and 22 October 2025, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in April 2025.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's key and (where applicable) provision judgements, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, John Spragg, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you and the chief executive officer (CEO) and deputy CEO of the EPA multi-academy trust; representatives of Magdalen College School Brackley Academy Trust; and members of the newly formed interim executive board, the executive headteacher and senior leaders the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We observed pupils' and students' arrival to, and egress from, both school sites, breaktimes, lunchtimes and the time between lessons, visited lessons and held meetings with staff, including support staff. We also scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and the provision for pupils receiving alternative provision. We spoke with pupils and students in the sixth form. I have considered all of this in coming to my judgement.

Magdalen College School continues to require special measures. Leaders have made insufficient progress to improve the school.

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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that a positive culture of safeguarding, welfare and vigilance permeates the school. The school must ensure that the school site is well managed and that the systems and processes linked to day-to-day routines are robust and well understood. Governors must have the knowledge and skills required to undertake their safeguarding responsibilities effectively.
- ensure that staff receive accurate information about pupils' starting points and that this information is used effectively to ensure pupils' and students' learning needs are much better met.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the last inspection, the leadership team has been restructured. Seventeen members of staff have left the school and 13 have joined, including a new special educational needs coordinator. A new visitor-management system has been installed across both school sites. Structural changes have taken place to improve the access and egress of sixth-form students and to improve the security. The school is more aware of which students are on or off site at any given time. Pupils can no longer access unsafe areas of the St John's site.

The focus of this first monitoring inspection was leadership and the effectiveness of safeguarding. Leaders, including governors from Magdalen College School Brackley Academy Trust, have been too slow to gain an accurate understanding of the school's position. They have not shown the capacity needed to address the findings from the last inspection at the pace needed. The ambition for the school and its pupils is too low.

Leaders have recently brokered external support from the EPA multi-academy trust. This includes leadership support. From September 2025, the deputy CEO and an executive headteacher from the trust have been working with the school. An interim executive board, including representatives of Magdalen College School Brackley Academy Trust and the EPA multi-academy trust, was formed in October 2025. Moving forward, this group will undertake the oversight of the school's improvement. This has added leadership capacity, but it is too soon to see the full impact of these changes.

The arrangements for safeguarding are still not effective. The culture of safeguarding in the school is poor. Although the safeguarding concerns raised at the previous inspection have been addressed, further safeguarding issues have been identified at this inspection.

The school still does not manage site access effectively. This is because the protocols in place to keep the main school site secure are poorly considered. The supervision of potentially dangerous areas is not robust enough. There are not the safeguarding systems and processes in place to ensure that staff show the vigilance needed to keep pupils safe. Governors have not completed the safeguarding training required for the role.

Staff do not have accurate information about pupils' starting points, learning gaps or the ambitious curriculum end points that they can achieve. As a result, pupils' learning needs are not successfully addressed. This has led to significant underachievement and is an issue that must be addressed at pace.

The school is in the early stages of reviewing the curriculum, including writing across the curriculum. The EPA multi-academy trust has provided subject-specific curriculum support. Teachers have visited other schools to share ideas and good practice. Curriculum reviews are planned. These professional development opportunities are of high quality and have been welcomed by staff. However, the quality of education is very inconsistent throughout the school, including in the sixth form.

New leadership and oversight of the provision for pupils with SEND is having a positive impact on pupils with SEND and those attending alternative provision. The arrangements around alternative provision have been strengthened and are now fit for purpose. Leaders have also improved their systems for identifying pupils with SEND. Teachers have received suitable training. They are beginning to apply this training to support these pupils more effectively. However, staff still do not routinely adapt their teaching to support pupils with SEND. These pupils underachieve, often because their needs are repeatedly not being met.

The actions taken to improve pupils' behaviour are a considerable success. The behaviour policy is implemented far more consistently. Staff feel much better supported by leaders. As a result, lessons are calmer. The amount of low-level disruption and internal truancy has reduced. Pupils really welcome this change and appreciate that they can now focus on their learning.

Staff have been through a period of considerable challenge and change. However, they value the very recent improvements, particularly the improvement in pupils' behaviour and the additional leadership support. Staff say that this has improved their workload and well-being.

The external support from the EPA multi-academy trust has had a significantly positive impact in a very brief amount of time. Of note is the school-based support of the executive headteacher and the deputy CEO. This support has significantly increased leadership capacity and has 'steadied the ship'. This is a positive step in the right direction, which is welcomed by staff and pupils and is much needed.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO or equivalent of the Magdalen College School Brackley Academy Trust, the Department for Education's

regional director and the director of children's services for West Northamptonshire local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman
His Majesty's Inspector