

School inspection report

10 October 2023 to 12 October 2023

Magdalen College School

Magdalen College School
Cowley Place
Oxford
Oxfordshire
OX4 1DZ

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

Contents

Summary of inspection findings	3
The extent to which the school meets the Standards:	5
Recommended next steps	5
Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance	6
Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation	7
Section 3: Pupils’ physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing	9
Section 4: Pupils’ social and economic education and contribution to society.....	11
Safeguarding.....	12
School details	13
Information about the school	14
Inspection details	14

Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors and senior leaders understand and meet their responsibilities to actively promote the wellbeing of pupils. Leaders check regularly the implementation of policies fully and well. As a result, the school provides a safe, supportive community in which pupils flourish.
2. Leaders and governors have a clear and well-articulated vision for the future of the school. The regular process of self-evaluation is detailed and thorough. Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development. Leaders consider current educational trends and the school's local context. Actual and potential risks are identified well. Leaders take appropriate and timely actions to mitigate risks.
3. The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. Schemes of work provide appropriate challenge for pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils are of high ability. Pupils are given the support they need and their progress is monitored carefully. As a result, pupils make good progress and consistently attain high grades in public examinations and almost all go on to higher education.
4. Typically, teachers have high expectations of pupils. However, some teaching in the junior school does not engage pupils sufficiently.
5. Pupils are ambitious, intellectually curious and searching in their questioning. Leaders have created a culture in which pupils respond positively to expectations to work hard and be focused learners. Pupils are proud of their school and are determined to make the most of their opportunities, both in lessons and through the well-planned extra-curricular programme. Pupils develop self-confidence and self-assurance during their time at the school. The choristers are proud of their role. They show great maturity in balancing their schoolwork with their choral commitments.
6. Leaders place considerable emphasis on the overall wellbeing and pastoral care of pupils. Pupils are happy and content in their school lives. There are well-developed systems to provide pastoral support both in junior and senior schools. Staff develop a deep knowledge of their pupils' abilities and needs. As a result, pupils trust their tutors to provide them with wise advice and support. Pupils understand fully the importance of mutual respect and that discrimination in any form is unacceptable. Pupils behave well and bullying is rare.
7. School leaders prioritise the health and safety of the school community. There are clear systems that ensure that the premises and accommodation remain well maintained, secure and safe. There are regular checks of fire procedures to reduce the risk from fire.
8. Safeguarding procedures reflect current guidance and are well understood by staff. An administrative error in one pre-employment check was rectified swiftly during the inspection.
9. The school's 'Lilium' programme of personal, social, health and economic education (PHSE) covers a wide range of areas, including personal relationships and healthy lifestyles. It is successful in helping pupils adopt a mature approach to their personal lives. It includes age-appropriate careers guidance. The school's long tradition of service is maintained in pupil-led fundraising activities and in the sixth

form's community service afternoons. As a result of this, pupils are well prepared for life in modern British society.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards:

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met

Recommended next steps

- Leaders and governors should strengthen their oversight of recruitment procedures to ensure that checks are completed and recorded appropriately for all adults in the school.
- Leaders should ensure that teaching in the junior school consistently sets high standards which engage pupils appropriately.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders have a clear, well-articulated vision for the future of the school which includes providing improved facilities and a focus on sustainability. This is reviewed regularly, with decisions informed by discussion papers, presentations from leaders and governors' own monitoring of the school. Leaders rigorously evaluate the school's success and the effectiveness of all areas of school life, resulting in a focus on continuous improvement for pupils' wellbeing.
11. Members of the governing body have a wide range of skills and experience that they draw on for the good of the school. They are knowledgeable and well trained. They are efficient in ensuring that all policies and procedures accurately reflect current guidance. Leaders and governors are alert to changes in the local and national context. This helps them to ensure that potential risks are identified and mitigating actions put in place. For example, changes to the traffic system in the city led the school to make alterations to its shared bus provision, directly benefiting pupils. In their planning and decision-making, senior leaders consistently demonstrate that they have the required knowledge and skills to enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively.
12. School leaders are experienced and well trained. Policies are well understood and consistently followed by staff, with heads of department and heads of section working closely together. There is a consistent and coherent approach to supporting pupils. Any emerging difficulties are managed swiftly by teachers who know pupils well. This helps to foster a community in which pupils' progress and their personal wellbeing are given equal focus.
13. Leaders and governors ensure that their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 are met. There is a suitable accessibility plan in place. Leaders provide equality of opportunity for all, including pupils and staff. They ensure that pupils understand the unacceptability of discriminatory practice.
14. All the necessary information is available to parents, either on the website or on request from the school. The school has an appropriate complaints policy and this is followed diligently. Security is given a high priority with controlled access to all buildings. Health and safety procedures are rigorous. As a result, the school is well maintained and the environment is conducive to learning.
15. Leaders and governors are well trained in safeguarding and understand their responsibilities in this regard. Safeguarding arrangements are appropriate. Leaders and governors have also ensured training and discussions have generated an open and transparent culture, where staff are vigilant and pupils are safe.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

All the relevant standards are met

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

16. Leaders have established a curriculum that provides pupils with opportunities to learn well across a wide range of subjects. It also enables pupils to pursue their own interests in 'Waynflete Studies', a programme requiring independent research. Leaders have close links with the university and, as a result, visiting academics further enrich pupils' learning. The curriculum takes account of the needs of the pupils, including those who have SEND. Leaders have created a culture of academic aspiration, led by teachers with strong subject knowledge and high expectations.
17. The curriculum enables pupils to deepen their understanding and develop their skills in a range of areas. Skilful teaching means that pupils develop strong mathematical skills, from the youngest junior pupils' confidence in mental arithmetic to the adept application of mathematical skills in science lessons by seniors. Pupils' oracy skills are well developed. They read confidently and write fluently from an early age thanks to teaching which gives strong support to the development of these skills. The information and communication technology (ICT) provision has been extended. Pupils, especially those in the sixth form, are confident in using ICT to research or organise their work. The curriculum gives opportunities for pupils to develop their creativity and this is evident in their design and technology outcomes, their artwork and in the love of music-making that runs through the school.
18. The learning support department ensures that the needs of pupils who have SEND are known well, so that strategies to support them are reflected in teaching. The individual support pupils receive from the learning support staff, their classroom teachers and their tutors is effective. Pupils who have SEND achieve at least in line with their peers.
19. Leaders and heads of department have put in place rigorous processes for assessing pupils' progress. Regular tests and assessment of pupils' classwork and homework enable teachers to check pupils' progress carefully. The positive relationships between staff and pupils ensure that pupils feel recognised as individuals and well supported in their endeavours. Regular meetings are held between teachers, the learning support department staff and leaders to discuss any pupils who are underachieving. This means that additional support or guidance is swiftly put in place when necessary. This close understanding of their needs and abilities supports pupils in making good progress. Senior school pupils reach high levels of attainment in public examinations. Almost all of them go on to universities with demanding entrance requirements.
20. Leaders focus on ensuring high-quality teaching for pupils who, as a result, are highly aspirational. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and use a range of strategies to maintain pupils' interest throughout lessons. Teaching is usually pitched at the right level and engages pupils. However, in the junior school, some teaching does not build well enough on the prior attainment and understanding of the pupils. When this is the case, pupils sometimes lose interest and become distracted.
21. Junior school pupils are typically engaged and excited by their learning. In their music lessons, choristers are invariably highly focused and strive for excellence. In the senior school, pupils are usually engaged and derive joy from their learning. Pupils are diligent and self-motivated. Pupils respond well to their teachers' feedback, which helps them to improve their work. The topics chosen for their Waynflete Studies show pupils' eagerness to move beyond what they are taught and to explore personal interests such as the impact of gender inequality in Japan and whether silicon-based life can exist in the universe.

22. Pupils flourish in their personal development. Leaders by providing a wide range of extra-curricular options each day help pupils develop their skills and challenge them to explore new interests. Clubs include physical, academic, musical and creative options. Others, such as 'Model United Nations' and Community Service Organisation (CSO), help develop pupils' social awareness and a sense of service.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

All the relevant standards are met

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

23. Leaders successfully promote mutual respect and tolerance. Teachers and senior pupils provide positive models of respectful, courteous behaviour. Teaching covers issues of difference between people and equality through the PHSE programme delivered in the school's *Lilium* lessons, promoting pupils understanding of legal and moral issues. Posters are displayed around the school reminding pupils that it is unacceptable to speak unkindly or disrespectfully about other people based on their personal characteristics. Leaders have created a culture in which female pupils joining the school in the sixth form have equal access to all that the school offers and are treated with friendly respect by their peers.
24. The culture created by school leaders draws on its Christian foundation and traditions. Regular assemblies recognise the diversity of beliefs in the school and refer to the core moral values these share. Pupils listen attentively in assembly and show a genuine interest in spiritual matters. For example, when a voluntary senior choir rehearsing for a choral evensong shows sensitivity to the power of the music and the words. In theology lessons, pupils raise thoughtful questions about the complex issue of human free will and contrast the range of Christian and Buddhist interpretations.
25. Leaders have established a strong pastoral system based on form tutoring. Pupils know that their teachers care about their personal wellbeing as well as their academic progress. As a result, pupils are happy and secure, with strong self-esteem and self-belief. Pupils speak warmly of the extent to which their teachers will 'go the extra mile' to help them achieve their ambitions. Pupils are secure in their knowledge that their tutors, heads of section and heads of year are sensitive to their mental health when making decisions and talking with their parents. As pupils develop in the school, they become independently confident, thoughtful and increasingly able to take responsibility for their own decisions.
26. Leaders encourage all pupils to become involved in sports. Pupils' participation in PE and games lessons is enthusiastic and pupils develop their skills well. A large proportion of pupils are involved in the various co-curricular clubs, which further encourage pupils' physical wellbeing. Discussions in PHSE sessions help pupils develop a strong understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet and of the importance of exercise, as well as relaxation, in maintaining a healthy life balance.
27. The well-structured PHSE programme reinforces pupils' understanding of healthy relationships as pupils mature. Pupils are well informed and understand their responsibilities to themselves and to others. The programme is reviewed annually in response to pupils' reflections and suggestions.
28. School leaders set high expectations of pupils' behaviour and make it clear that bullying is unacceptable. Pupils behave well, with very few serious breaches of the school's policy. The school's anti-bullying policy is clear and effective. Bullying is rare and the school deals with any instances that do occur firmly and with sensitivity to all concerned.
29. Leaders are tenacious in their oversight of health and safety in the school. A robust programme of regular checks is in place. Staff are alert to potential risks, including those from fire and promptly report any which arise. This ensures that the school provides a safe, secure and well-maintained environment. Resources are up to date and suitable. Pupils are well supervised in an age-

appropriate way. There are suitable first aid facilities, overseen by a team of qualified nurses. Attendance and admissions registers are kept properly and any issues are followed up promptly.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

All the relevant standards are met

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

30. Leaders consistently emphasise the importance of mutual respect and tolerance through discussion in PHSE sessions and a curriculum that ensures that pupils understand the importance of such attitudes in modern British society. For example, older pupils have secure understanding of being part of a democratic society and the importance of contributing by using their vote when of age. The curriculum ensures that pupils understand the issues which have helped in the formation of the modern world and Britain, for example when studying topics covering revolutions and political reforms in history.
31. The school curriculum has been adapted to reflect the diversity in modern British society. The curriculum represents the whole school community well. For example, the English department's suggestions for wider reading include a number of works by authors from a range of ethnicities and the music curriculum introduces pupils to music from Indonesia, India and Latin America. Staff promote respect and acceptance for all, regardless of background or ability.
32. Pupils' understanding of British culture and traditions is secure because the curriculum and topic choices in humanities often emphasise these. Pupils are proud of their school's history. The school's continued support of the choristers is a strong link with that history. Choristers are proud of their contribution to this. The love of music this tradition generates feeds into the whole school community's pleasure in singing and music making.
33. There is a comprehensive careers education programme which includes developing pupils' economic awareness. Junior school pupils reflect on the personal qualities needed to succeed in their learning. In the lower years in the senior school, pupils reflect on their personal skills and interests. They are encouraged to draw on the self-knowledge this brings as they consider GCSE and A-level subject choices. The school ensures that work experience, presentations from visiting speakers and attendance at career fairs further support pupils' understanding of the possibilities open to them. Career sessions in the sixth form provide pupils with close guidance in preparing for university entrance, including the practicalities such as fees and student loans. Career guidance is objective and ensures pupils are informed about other routes available to them including apprenticeships.
34. Leaders promote service as a key value. Charity work is active throughout the school. For example, pupils have raised funds for a school in Uganda by imaginative efforts such as creating a cookbook to sell. Money has been raised through pupil-initiated events for local charities, including one supporting refugees. The curriculum for Year 12 gives an afternoon each week over to community service. Some pupils choose to use this time in mentoring pupils from local partner primary schools. Pupils also contribute to their own community in taking on responsibility in roles such as becoming an eco-representative or a member of the school council, providing a way for school leaders to hear of and respond to pupils' suggestions. Sixth-form prefects and senior prefects take pride in their responsibilities to mentor junior pupils and act as role models for positive leadership.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

All relevant standards are met

Safeguarding

35. Arrangements to safeguard and protect the welfare of the pupils are secure. Policies reflect the most recent guidance and care is taken to work closely with Magdalen College to ensure the safeguarding of the choristers.
36. Leaders have an appropriate recruitment policy to ensure that all safeguarding checks are completed before an individual is allowed to begin working at the school. The process of making pre-employment checks is appropriate. However, the school took remedial action during the inspection to correct an administrative error in the process. Checks are recorded on a single central record, as required.
37. School leaders and staff are vigilant in their approach to safeguarding. Governors are trained appropriately and a designated governor liaises regularly with the school's safeguarding lead. Governors ensure there are strong systems for monitoring usage of the school's internet system and filtering of inappropriate material. The designated safeguarding lead is supported by a team of deputies, all of whom are trained to the required level. School leaders have established a strong and supportive relationship with local agencies. Thorough records are kept and stored securely. Action is taken swiftly when a concern arises.
38. All staff are well trained on joining the school as part of their induction. Training includes understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures, internet safety and alertness to extremism. Staff receive regular updates so that they fully understand their responsibilities and report concerns promptly.
39. The school culture is transparent and open. There are well-established ways for pupils to express their opinions and seek support. Pupils feel safe at school.
40. Staff are alert to concerns, implementing the safeguarding policy carefully.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All relevant standards are met

School details

School	Magdalen College School
Department for Education number	931/6094
Registered charity number	295785
Address	Cowley Place Oxford OX4 1DZ
Website	www.mcsoxford.org
Proprietor	Magdalen College School Limited
Chair	Mr Robert Price
Headteacher	Ms Helen Pike
Age range	7 to 18
Number of pupils	962
Date of previous inspection	15 to 16 January 2020

Information about the school

41. Magdalen College School is an independent day school for male pupils from the age of 7 to 16 and for both male and female pupils in the sixth form. It is located close to Magdalen College in Oxford. The junior school for pupils aged 7 to 11 occupies its own building close to the senior school. The school is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. A new chair of governors has been appointed since the previous inspection.
42. The school has identified 62 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are no pupils with an education, health and care plan.
43. English is an additional language for 140 pupils. All are fluent in English. An additional 207 pupils are bilingual.
44. The school states that it aims to facilitate an intellectual and moral education in a liberal, safe and supportive community, so that pupils develop independent and searching minds. It sets out to enable pupils to develop the confidence to embrace challenge and to make positive contributions to their communities.

Inspection details

Inspection dates 10 to 12 October 2023

45. A team of eight inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The onsite inspection was quality assured.
46. Inspection activities included:
- discussions with teaching and support staff, leaders and managers, and members of the governing body
 - discussion with learning support staff
 - discussions with pupils about their academic education, wellbeing and their experiences of school life
 - observations of lessons across all year groups
 - learning walks with senior staff
 - scrutiny of pupils' work in collaboration with pupils and staff
 - observations of a sample of co-curricular activities
 - attendance at registration, form times and a chapel assembly
 - tours of both sites of the school.
47. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://www.isi.net)