

Michael Hall School

Welfare inspection report for a boarding school

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

Michael Hall School was founded in 1925 as the first Steiner Waldorf school in the English speaking world. It offers education to children from the ages of three to 18 years of age. The school occupies Kidbrooke Park, a large site of over 60 acres. At the time of the inspection, there were 525 pupils on role of whom 11 were boarders. Eight of the boarders have English as their second language. All boarders live with boarding families in their houses which are in the local community.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	outstanding
Outcomes for boarders	outstanding
Quality of boarding provision and care	outstanding
Boarders' safety	outstanding
Leadership and management of boarding	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the boarding inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the boarding provision is excellent. There are significant strengths in the care provided and staff have very high expectations of and aspirations for students. This has an excellent impact on their progress and outcomes.
- Boarders have their individual needs met in an excellent manner within a vibrant and culturally diverse environment. An ethos of mutual respect permeates the whole school and in particular is cemented in the fabric of everyday life within the small boarding community.
- There is a continual focus on developing the services and facilities available. A reflective senior management team assesses the provision with a continuous view to improve the service.
- Robust systems actively promote boarders' safety and welfare. Boarders feel exceptionally safe and secure and have adults to whom they can turn to for support at any time.
- Boarders feel they receive excellent care and say they are looked after and feel they are part of a family. An obvious sense of community is further nurtured by the excellent quality of relationships between boarders and the adults who care for them.
- The member of staff responsible for oversight and coordination of the boarding service offers excellent, well thought out guidance and support to both boarders and boarding parents.
- Effective communication between staff groups and boarding parents ensures

boarders' emotional and physical health needs are recognised and met. Parents are consistently positive about the boarding experience and the effectiveness of staff communication. 'They go the extra mile' was a comment made by one parent.

- Boarders from this country and around the world enjoy their boarding. Exceptionally good boarding experiences promote their personal, cultural and social development.
- All the national minimum standards have been met or exceeded.

Outcomes for boarders

Outcomes for boarders are outstanding. Boarders benefit from extremely positive relationships with staff and each other. The idea of difference is valued and celebrated. There are different nationalities among the pupils and staff group and this diversity contributes to a vibrant and stimulating environment. Difference in backgrounds and culture is celebrated and seen as an opportunity to learn from each other for everyone in the school community.

Boarders are encouraged and supported to develop independence, confidence and self-esteem and to progress in their learning and development of their life skills. Some boarders have made remarkable progress at the school, especially when bearing in mind their starting points. All boarders benefit from individual programmes which enable them to prepare for the next stages of their lives, whether these are college, university or employment opportunities. The programmes take into account their vulnerabilities, plans and aspirations. 'I know they will support me.' was a comment made by a boarder.

Tolerance and understanding is embedded in the culture and day-to-day living at the school. This enables all pupils, including boarders, to live in an environment where they are respected and valued.

Boarders are unanimous in their feedback about how they enjoy their boarding and how the school has given them the opportunity to learn and take part in enriching activities and experiences. 'We learn so much here.' was a comment made by a boarder.

All boarders are treated as part of the family that they are placed with and are encouraged to voice their opinions and preferences to their boarding parents. Additionally they have weekly meetings with key members of staff to ensure that they are happy where they are living. This approach ensures their views are valued and promoted to an excellent standard and that they have numerous individuals whom they can approach to share their thoughts and feelings.

Boarders benefit from living in a community which promotes and values their

emotional health to an excellent standard. They have close support available to them to ensure they feel safe and nurtured.

Quality of boarding provision and care

The quality of the boarding provision is outstanding. Pastoral support offered to boarders is supportive and nurturing and significantly encourages their growth and developing independence. Close liaison between teaching and pastoral staff ensures that boarders needing extra support have this attended to swiftly and effectively.

Boarding parents are highly committed to their tasks and are able to offer high standards of guidance, care and advice to those boarders who need it. Specific, sensitive and well thought out strategies to support behavioural and emotional needs are implemented when needed.

The staff team and curriculum in the school ensure that boarders have an excellent and varied range of activities available to them. Numerous clubs and sports are readily available and the wide range offers something for every pupil in the school. Examples of activities include lessons in playing various musical instruments, numerous sporting activities, trips abroad and involvement in drama and art clubs.

Boarding parents are responsible for overseeing the administration of medication to boarders who live in their houses. This ensures that they take their medication on time and at the correct doses. Boarders are also assessed as to whether they are able to self-administer their own medication. This enables them to take age appropriate responsibility for their own health issues. The school has an on-site medical facility which is staffed by a qualified nurse and this ensures there is swift access to any advice or treatment a boarder may need while on the school premises.

Boarders' emotional well-being is promoted to a particularly high standard. The pastoral team liaises closely with the boarding coordinator and boarding parents to ensure that bespoke packages of support can be put in place where needed.

Boarding facilities in each of the houses are visited regularly by the boarding coordinator to ensure that they are safe and comfortable. Feedback from all of the boarders is extremely positive about their living arrangements.

The induction process for new boarders is excellent. They are closely supported in settling into their houses and are also able to choose their accommodation prior to their arrival. Weekly reviews of their well-being and happiness in their boarding houses are held to ensure they continue to be content and feel safely cared for.

All boarders report that the food provided in their boarding houses is of an excellent quality. Additionally, the canteen on site offers an excellent standard of catering. Foods are locally sourced from organic producers and vegetables that have been grown in the school's own garden are used. Any specific dietary needs are known

about and catered for.

All boarders can contact their friends and loved ones with no problems at all. They all have access to mobile telephones, landlines, email and electronic video messaging.

Boarders' safety

There is excellent provision at the school for ensuring boarders are safe and protected from harm. Comprehensive recruitment procedures are effectively implemented. The thorough and robust recruitment procedures ensure that only adults who have been checked as being appropriate to work with children are employed.

Boarders live in a very safe environment amid a culture that is built on the safety and well-being of each and every pupil in the school. A robust approach is in place to address child protection which is disseminated to all staff groups. Staff are proactive in promoting and protecting the welfare of pupils and hold their well-being at the centre of their practice. All activities and environmental features are routinely and robustly assessed. Boarders have excellent opportunities to try new and challenging activities in a safe and structured way.

Boarders report there is no bullying; they feel safe, secure and well cared for. They spoke of feeling valued and respected and are confident that staff would notice any signs that a boarder was unhappy, or that this would be reported to staff by other boarders. Pupils clearly see it as the role of everyone in the school to look after each other and take action to ensure that they are all safe and happy.

Clear behavioural expectations are in place for all pupils at the school. Boarders say these are fair and reasonable. High standards of behaviour are observed around the campus with pupils showing politeness and respect to adults and peers alike.

The boarding aspect of the school meets any specific needs and vulnerabilities to an excellent standard. Clear written plans and strategies are put in place and shared with key members of staff as well as boarding parents to ensure each boarder's welfare is promoted to an excellent standard. 'If you've got a problem the school will always sort it.' was a comment made by one boarder.

Leadership and management of boarding

The leadership and management of the boarding provision are outstanding. An experienced senior management team provides excellent oversight and monitoring of standards. Any weaknesses are identified thorough self-evaluation and action plans are put in place. The senior management team is reflective about practice and is ambitious to drive forward improvements and quality which are already of a high standard.

There is a clear Statement of Purpose which outlines the aims and aspirations of the school. In addition the school has a detailed and very informative website.

The boarding provision is staffed with committed boarding parents who share in the culture and ethos of the school. There is a strong and purposeful drive to place the views, social and educational needs of boarders at the centre of their practice. Routines and procedures are clear, well established and operate consistently to provide a safe, sensitive and motivating environment for all. There is a consistent focus on achievement and praise and a very strong emphasis on building and maintaining meaningful and respectful relationships between staff, boarders and their families.

There is a strong drive for continued improvement of the boarding service and, most significantly, for the boarders. The coordinator who oversees boarding closely monitors boarding practice to ensure that high standards are maintained. Boarding is seen as an integral part of the school.

A comprehensive approach is taken to training and supporting staff. This ensures they are aware of their duties and obligations and that they can meet specific individual needs to an excellent standard. Boarding parents report that they receive excellent support and guidance and feel motivated to be part of such a caring and experienced team. Particular praise is given to the coordinator for boarding by both boarders and boarding parents.

All required policies, documents and records are in place and support effective staff practice and excellent management of the service. These documents are reviewed and updated regularly to ensure they are relevant and up to date.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12/11/2012

Dear Boarders,

Inspection of Michael Hall School

As you may know, I recently inspected the boarding provision at your school.

I spent time in the boarding houses, went to the canteen for a meal, met with groups of you, met with members of staff and examined numerous records. I have considered your views about boarding when coming to the conclusion that the school offers an outstanding boarding service.

I found there is clearly a great deal of mutual respect and trust between boarding students, staff and boarding parents. The oversight of the boarding service is excellent and provides an environment in which you thrive and develop. There are a wide range of activities for you to enjoy after school and you are all able to keep in contact with your families and friends. I am very impressed by the support you receive and the fact that you have so many adults that you can turn to for help and advice.

I am also very impressed with how you all seem to enjoy that there are so many people in your school community from so many different countries and backgrounds.

You have a really good team of nursing staff who make sure you have the support you need if you are injured or unwell at school and you have all your health needs met by your boarding parents.

I feel most strongly that the management team and the staff who care for you are excellent. They provide you with the highest standards of care and consider your needs fully at all times. I am particularly impressed by the care and support given to you and the boarding parents by the boarding coordinator. She really does try her utmost to make sure everyone is safe and happy.

Many thanks for your openness and welcoming approach during my visit to your school.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Taylor