

Michael Hall School

Kidbrooke Park, Priory Road, Forest Row, East Sussex RH18 5JA

Inspection dates

1 December 2020

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7, 11, 14 and 16

- The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ofsted to conduct this emergency inspection following receipt of several complaints about the school. The complaints raised concerns about various matters relating to pupils' welfare, health and safety. The information shared confidentially with the DfE also raised questions about the school's leadership and management, including processes for dealing with parental concerns or complaints.
- Previous inspections judged the school to have unmet independent school standards relating to the quality of education (Part 1) and leadership and management (Part 8). The quality of the education was not part of this inspection, so the standards in Part 1 and associated standards in Part 8 remain unmet.
- All of the other standards checked during this inspection were met. The issues arising from the complaints received by the DfE do not correspond with other evidence about current arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils, or the way the school handles complaints.
- The school's safeguarding policy is published on the website. It contains the information required by the Secretary of State and sets out clearly the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils. Leaders liaise with the local area designated officer on relevant safeguarding matters.
- There has been a recent change of designated lead responsible for safeguarding. Circumstances mean that a full handover during this transition has not happened as hoped. Nonetheless, the new lead has suitable training and a sound oversight of safeguarding has been maintained.
- The new designated lead has a helpful action plan of sensible steps she proposes to take to further strengthen the school's safeguarding arrangements. The new ways to make safeguarding increasingly systematic are well conceived and likely to support the school in ensuring its obligations are continually met.

- Leaders have taken great care and remained steadfast to follow guidance about managing the risks relating to COVID-19 (coronavirus) despite some considerable resistance from some within the community.
- Staff follow clear protocols for the supervision of all pupils, including in the grounds. Leaders have ensured suitable procedures are followed for the safe collection of young pupils from school.
- A risk assessment policy and written risk assessments of the expansive grounds reflect the measures in place and were described by leaders and pupils as being aimed at keeping pupils safe.
- Pupils feel safe and well supervised in school. They are confident that there is someone they can go to if they were worried or feeling unhappy, although one pupil commented that they might not have the chance because 'staff would spot them first'. Older students commented that the school's adults 'take time' with them 'and really care'.
- The paragraphs that were checked in this part are met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33

- The principles of the school's 'concerns and complaints procedure' are rooted in the school's ethos.
- The policy meets all requirements. For example, it allows for concerns to be raised informally initially and sets out arrangements for making a formal complaint for unresolved matters. Arrangements for complaints panels meet requirements.
- Records indicate a diligent and serious approach to dealing with complaints. Leaders' response is aimed not only at resolving concerns, but also learning from them to make the school better.
- The paragraph in this part is met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b)

- The leadership and management of the school remains in a period of transition at trustee and senior-leader levels. Through this challenging period, leaders have ensured that standards relating to pupils' welfare, health and safety continue to be met. Their success in this respect is partly due to their positive response and willingness to review procedures when matters are brought to their attention.
- Leaders are committed to seeking a cultural change in the school to ensure that it is continuously compliant with all relevant requirements. This has led to some turbulence in the school's community. Wherever possible, leaders aim to tackle the issues that arise strategically by strengthening policies and procedures. Trustees make judicious use of independent external advice to reach an impartial view, where helpful.
- This term, the council of trustees has moved to restructure its committees and formalise the membership arrangements for them. However, it is too soon to see the difference these changes might make to the effectiveness of the school.

- It was not possible during this inspection to assess the impact of the new leadership arrangements on the quality of education. During Ofsted's interim phase linked with COVID-19 restrictions, inspectors are not routinely checking these requirements.
- The paragraph in this part remains unmet.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection, as set out in the annex of this report. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	114625
DfE registration number	845/6037
Inspection number	10169762

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Steiner Waldorf School
School status	Independent boarding school
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	390
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	40
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Council of Trustees of the Michael Hall School
Chair	Jon Sharpe
Principal	Paul Farr
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,000–£13,500
Telephone number	01342 822 275
Website	www.michaelhall.co.uk
Email address	paul.farr@michaelhall.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	26 to 28 March 2019

Information about this school

- At the time of this school's previous standard inspection, 26 to 28 March 2019, it was judged not to be meeting some of the independent school standards. A subsequent progress monitoring inspection conducted on 20 November 2019 found that some of the standards remained unmet.

- This school adheres to the international Steiner Waldorf curriculum developed by the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner.
- Since the March progress monitoring inspection, the director of operations has left, and the director of learning has been appointed as principal, in overall charge.
- Michael Hall School is a charitable trust company called Michael Hall School Ltd. The company members, known as the 'association', appoint the 'council' from among its ranks.
- The chair of the council has changed twice since the time of the previous standard inspection. The new chair of trustees took up this position in Sep 2020, having joined the council in November 2019.
- The school has an approved exemption from some aspects of the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage.
- The school does not use alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the DfE because of various concerns raised about the school.
- The inspection focused on requirements relating to: pupils' welfare, health and safety; school processes for handling complaints; and leadership and management.
- The inspector met with the principal, other senior leaders, the chair of council and another trustee. He spoke with a group of staff and two groups of pupils. The inspector scrutinised documents and records relevant to the independent school standards being checked. He observed arrangements for collecting primary-age pupils from school.
- This inspection was conducted with 30 minutes' notice.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and were not checked during this inspection

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are–
 - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

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