

Inspection of Michael Hall School

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

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 October 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils from the Kindergarten to the sixth form are happy and confident at Michael Hall School. They are proud to be part of a caring community where everyone is welcomed for who they are. They feel safe, particularly from bullying and unkind behaviour, which are dealt with well, should they happen.

Behaviour generally is thoughtful and considerate, although in lessons some pupils in the lower school experience some off-task interruptions from other pupils, where staff's expectations are not yet at the high standard of the rest of the school. It is a similar picture for academic expectations: sixth-form students and older pupils benefit from expert instruction and the high ambition that staff have for their progress through the planned curriculum.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not have the same positive experience as other pupils. They are not always supported effectively. Their needs are not clearly shared with staff and so are not met well enough.

After much turbulence of leadership in recent years, the school is improving. Pupils and parents and carers recognise leaders' determination to address weaknesses and to ensure that pupils have a broad and rich experience throughout their time at school. Pupils' learning is supported very well by the enrichment events and trips they are offered.

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

Leaders have improved the school by addressing many of the previous weaknesses successfully. They have ensured that staff are motivated and that most understand how pupils' learning builds over time. Subject-specialist teachers in the upper school and sixth form ensure that pupils receive a high-quality education. These staff know pupils really well and accurately identify what they know and what they need more help with. This approach to assessment is effective and helps older pupils and sixth-form students to make good progress through the planned curriculum.

These subject specialists have started to support colleagues in the lower school to ensure that they have the expertise needed to deliver the detail of each subject as it appears through the main lesson. While this work is in its infancy, it is already proving effective, particularly in science and mathematics. It helps staff to deliver the broad, rich curriculum that leaders intend.

At the start of the school, Kindergarten children are cared for well. They learn routines and develop their sense of self-worth. Adults work together effectively. They guide children to be curious about the world when exploring nature during walks. Children watch stories told through puppet shows with fascination and hang onto every exciting word. They work very well together, taking turns and helping each other to re-tell these stories with accuracy and attention to detail.

Older pupils in the Kindergarten (Year 1 pupils) join in with their younger peers well. Staff have projects available for them to consider when they are ready, but these projects do not ensure that pupils are fully prepared for joining class 1 in the lower school. Kindergarten staff do not have a strong enough understanding of what these pupils are expected to do when they move on. This lack of effective planning hinders pupils' development as they move to the lower school and the different routines there.

The provision for pupils with SEND does not take account of the aptitudes and needs of these pupils. Although there is better provision in the early stages of Kindergarten and in the sixth form, where pupils' needs are better known and planned for, in the main school there is poor identification of pupils' needs. Additionally, there is some confusion about what support might be needed when particular needs are recognised. Leaders have not communicated with staff effectively or ensured that they know how best to meet the needs of pupils with SEND.

These weaknesses in the provision for pupils in the final year of Kindergarten and in the main school, including for pupils with SEND, mean that the independent school standards (the standards) around curriculum planning and teaching to meet different pupils' needs are not met. Many of these weaknesses are due to poor leadership and oversight of provision for pupils with SEND, so the standards relating to the quality of leadership and management are not met.

Subject leadership has been newly introduced and is starting to be effective. For example, leaders have ensured that the physical education curriculum carefully prepares pupils to make the most of memorable experiences, such as the history walk of Hadrian's Wall. Other subject leaders are still developing their knowledge and that of their colleagues. Senior leaders are supporting them well, but their inexperience currently means that leadership capacity is stretched at times.

Leaders are dedicated to ensuring that all pupils become confident readers. Leaders have invested in useful resources and refreshed the school library to help achieve this. Older pupils love the range of books available and talk about them with enthusiasm. The passion of the reading leader inspires staff who have been trained to use the new resources to help pupils who are learning to read, but this work is at an early stage. Some staff currently lack the training and knowledge to use the new resources successfully.

Pupils in the upper school and students in the sixth form are highly motivated and have very positive attitudes to learning. Lower down the main school, there is some low-level disruption in lessons. Leaders have already identified the need to raise expectations for behaviour and engagement in some areas of the school.

The wide and rich curriculum provides pupils with strong knowledge of the wider world, including thinking about how cultural influences shape our heritage. There is a conscious ethical dimension to the curriculum, including thinking about equalities. Pupils relish these discussions and welcome the honesty and expertise with which

staff guide them to consider their place in the world. However, learning about careers and options after school is not fully developed for pupils in classes 7 and 8.

Trustees have acted decisively and effectively to set the school on the right track following previous difficulties. They have taken innovative decisions that are showing early promise, for example by putting the right leaders in place to move the school on. As the proprietor body, they have undertaken extensive and appropriate training to ensure that they understand their responsibilities, including for safeguarding and in relation to the standards. They have sensibly prioritised changes and show capacity for further improvement. They ensure that they take account of staff workload as they roll out improvements. This careful and considered approach has helped them to enthuse staff and to secure the needed changes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that all staff understand their responsibilities regarding safeguarding. These are outlined carefully in the safeguarding policy, which is fit for purpose and published on the school's website.

Leaders have provided all staff with effective training that means that staff identify pupils who may be at risk. Staff follow the school processes well to make sure that all information about pupils is shared properly. Leaders follow this up quickly and work with outside partners effectively.

Leaders also ensure that pupils understand potential risks and how to respond to these in order to keep themselves safe.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Staff knowledge about pupils with SEND is weak. Some staff do not know what pupils' needs are or how best to support them. Consequently, these pupils' needs are not met well enough. Leaders must ensure that there is a clear process for identifying and communicating information. They must also ensure that staff understand what this information means for their practice and how best to adapt their lessons to meet pupils' needs.
- Some middle leaders are still developing their understanding of their roles. They have not ensured that staff across the school are delivering learning as leaders intend. Senior leaders need to build leadership capacity across the school so that leaders at all levels have the knowledge and time that they need to support colleagues and hold them to account.
- The curriculum offer in the lower school and the last year of Kindergarten is not as ambitious as that for older pupils. Pupils in the last year of Kindergarten are not fully prepared for life in the lower school and find it tricky to settle into the expected ways of working. For younger pupils, staff's knowledge of the whole

curriculum is not consistently strong enough. Leaders need to ensure that Kindergarten staff know what is expected of pupils when they move to the lower school and how to prepare pupils for this. Leaders should also continue the work of subject specialists in supporting all colleagues to develop expert knowledge of the curriculum and how best to deliver it.

- Careers education, information, advice and guidance are not fully developed for younger secondary-aged pupils. This hinders pupils' knowledge about their options and future possibilities. Leaders must ensure that the full range of planned learning and activities start from class 7 (Year 8).
- Leaders' high expectations for behaviour throughout the school are not realised consistently, particularly in the lower school. Some pupils' learning is interrupted by off-task behaviour. Leaders must ensure that all staff apply the same standards and responses to such behaviour.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	114625
DfE registration number	845/6037
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10240002
Type of school	Steiner Waldorf School
School category	Independent 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	387
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	39
Number of part-time pupils	42
Proprietor	Council of Trustees of the Michael Hall School
Chair	William Forward
Principal	Sarah Stokes
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,481 to £14,241
Telephone number	01342 822 275
Website	www.michaelhall.co.uk
Email address	contact@michaelhall.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 to 28 March 2019

Information about this school

- The school's most recent standard inspection took place in March 2019. Since then, the school has received three progress monitoring inspections, in November 2019, March 2021 and November 2021. In addition, an emergency inspection took place in December 2020 because of concerns raised about the school. As part of this standard inspection, leaders requested a material change to consider whether they could take children aged two. Inspectors found that they are not likely to meet the independent school standards linked to this request.
- From March 2021 to September 2022, the school was led by an acting principal. In September 2022, a new principal joined the school and the acting principal moved to the role of director of studies.
- Michael Hall School is a charitable trust company called Michael Hall School Limited. The company members, known collectively as the association, appoint the council from among their ranks.
- The school adheres to the international Steiner Waldorf curriculum developed by the Austrian philosopher, Rudolf Steiner.
- 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 currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings during the inspection. These included meetings with the principal, head of studies, head of Kindergarten, the trustees and many school staff and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, science, history and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also visited Kindergarten and sixth-form sessions and spoke to leaders about learning across the whole curriculum.

- Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements in the school by speaking to members of staff and pupils. They also met with the designated safeguarding lead and her team to examine their knowledge, records and actions. During these meetings, inspectors scrutinised records, including those relating to the safer recruitment of staff. The lead inspector scrutinised case files to explore how the school identifies and supports pupils at risk of harm.
- Inspectors looked at the school's website, toured the school premises, examined policies and associated documentation and spoke to staff to consider how the school meets the standards.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents and carers through consideration of responses to Ofsted Parent View and the accompanying free-text comments.
- The views of staff were captured through conversations and scrutiny of the responses to the online staff survey.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in class, around the school and in organised groups. They took account of the responses to the online pupil survey and a note written by a pupil to the inspection team.

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is unlikely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**
- Leaders have not set out the programme of activities appropriate to children's education needs in relation to personal, social, emotional and physical development and communication and language skills. Part 2 of the standards is not likely to be met.
- The safeguarding policy and procedures have not been updated to take into account the proposed extended age range. Leaders have not adapted the behaviour and anti-bullying policies for two-year-old children. They have not produced a risk assessment policy or associated risk assessments. It is likely that paragraphs 7, 9, 10 and 16 would not be met.
- The standards related to relevant health and safety laws, fire safety and first aid are likely to be met because leaders have implemented these as required.
- Leaders intend to continue to implement current processes relating to ensuring staff's suitability to work with children. The intended building is set up with the required facilities for the proposed group. It is likely that the requirements of parts 4 and 5 of the standards would be met.
- Leaders have not demonstrated the knowledge required to cater for this group of children. Trustees have seen the proposal, but do not know the details of what this means. The requirements of part 8 of the standards are not likely to be met.

The school is unlikely to meet the following standards

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor–
 - 5(a) actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs;
 - 5(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which–
 - 5(b)(i) enable pupils to develop their self knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence;
 - 5(b)(ii) enable pupils to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the civil and criminal law of England;
 - 5(b)(iii) encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality in which the school is situated and to society more widely;
 - 5(b)(iv) enable pupils to acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services in England;
 - 5(b)(v) further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures;
 - 5(b)(vi) encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act; and
 - 5(b)(vii) encourage respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic process, including respect for the basis on which the law is made and applied in England;
 - 5(c) precludes the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school; and
 - 5(d) takes such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils–
 - 5(d)(i) while they are in attendance at the school,
 - 5(d)(ii) while they are taking part in extra-curricular activities which are provided or organised by or on behalf of the school, or
 - 5(d)(iii) in the promotion at the school, including through the distribution of promotional material, of extra-curricular activities taking place at the school or elsewhere,
 - they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that–
 - 9(a) a written behaviour policy is drawn up that, amongst other matters, sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupil misbehaviour;
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively; and
 - 9(c) a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour.
- 10 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that bullying at the school is prevented in so far as reasonably practicable, by the drawing up and implementation of an effective anti-bullying strategy.
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

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; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Information about the material change inspection

- Inspectors considered the independent school standards in relation to the requested material change to admit two-year-old children. As part of this, they inspected the proposed premises, spoke to leaders and trustees, and examined related paperwork and policies.

Inspection team

Lucy English, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lee Selby

His Majesty's Inspector

Philippa Darley

His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

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; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work–
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan; and
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–
 - 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;

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 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently;

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