

# Michael Hall School

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

**Inspection date**

3 October 2023

**Overall outcome**

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

## Main inspection findings

### Part 1. Quality of education provided

*Paragraphs 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 3, 3(d)*

- At the previous inspection, there were weaknesses in how the curriculum was being delivered. Provision was not sufficiently ambitious or matched well to pupils' needs, particularly in the lower school. Children in the final year of the kindergarten were not prepared sufficiently well for more formal learning in class 1 (Year 2). Provision to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) was not enabling these pupils to flourish. Leaders have acted decisively to address the previous weaknesses, but with varying degrees of impact.
- Leaders promptly considered the previous weaknesses around supporting older kindergarten children to be ready for class 1. Visits by kindergarten staff to the lower school have given them a much clearer sense of what children need to be prepared for, both in terms of learning and the environment. Similarly, visits to the kindergarten by class 1 teachers have helped them to better understand pupils' needs when they arrive in class 1.
- The transition programme for children in the final year of kindergarten has been reviewed and improved. Opportunities for children to work more formally together now start earlier in the year, with visits to class 1 helping them to become familiar with what is expected of them in that part of the school. Class 1 staff have a better understanding of pupils' needs and what they will have already learned in the kindergarten. Pupils are now more engaged with their learning because it is better matched to their needs than in the past.
- Since the last inspection, an additional class – Saplings – has been introduced, which caters for two-year-old children. The curriculum is appropriately focused on speech, socialising and emotional support, with adults alert to children's starting points. Evidence indicates that the curriculum in this part of the school is fit for purpose, in line with other parts of the early years curriculum.
- Leaders have looked carefully at provision for pupils with SEND. They recognise the need for all staff to be experts in providing appropriately for these pupils' needs. An important first step has been ensuring that pupils' specific needs are clearly identified and that

relevant information is shared with the staff who work with them. During visits to lessons, some staff shared the information that they hold about the pupils in their classes, including those with education, health and care plans (EHC plan).

- Pupils' progress meetings are beginning to provide opportunities for staff and leaders to develop a better sense of the progress that pupils are making and what additional support they may need. Additional staff have been deployed in the lower school to provide extra in-class help for pupils. However, there is more to do to ensure that staff routinely take pupils' additional needs into account when planning future learning and supporting pupils' work in class.
- Leadership of provision for SEND is currently in a state of transition. Leaders intend to put an inclusion coordinator in place, who will oversee provision for pupils with SEND and other aspects of pupils' welfare. However, this appointment had not been made at the time of the inspection. In the interim, leaders are ensuring that statutory arrangements are met for pupils with EHC plans, but recognise they are at the beginning of the school's journey of improvement in this area.
- Although there has been clear progress with regard to the un-met independent school standards (the standards), some of this work has not come sufficiently to fruition. Therefore the un-met standards in this part continue to be un-met.

### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

#### *Paragraphs 7 to 7(b), 32(1)(c)*

- At the previous inspection, safeguarding was judged to be effective, and the relevant parts of the standards were judged to be met. That continues to be the case.
- Safeguarding arrangements are overseen by a well-coordinated group of competent and knowledgeable leaders. They understand their collective role very well and are alert to the potential risks to pupils. Their work is overseen well by the safeguarding trustee, who has suitable knowledge to carry out this role.
- The school's safeguarding policy is fit for purpose. It is published on the school's website, making it readily accessible to stakeholders. It takes account of recent changes to statutory guidance and all other requirements.
- Staff, leaders and trustees are suitably trained to understand their safeguarding duties. Concerns about pupils are spotted and reported promptly, with actions documented carefully. This enables leaders to make timely referrals to the local authority when pupils need extra help to keep them safe.
- The relevant standards in this part continue to be met.

### Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

#### *Paragraphs 33 to 33(k)*

- Arrangements for addressing complaints were fit for purpose at the last inspection. Inspectors were asked to review them at this inspection, in light of concerns raised with the Department for Education (DfE).
- Since the last inspection, leaders and trustees have reviewed how complaints are managed by the school. They have sensibly sought advice from experts from beyond the school to develop this aspect of their policy and practice. They are keen to learn lessons

from any complaints that may arise.

- The school's complaints policy is fit for purpose. It meets the requirements of this part of the standards. It is available on the school's website. Some named contacts are in the process of being updated to reflect recent changes to the board of trustees.
- This part of the standards continues to be met.

## Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

### *Paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b)*

- At the last inspection, some of the standards in part 8 were not met. Leaders had not ensured that all of the other parts of the standards were met consistently. Their work to improve the school was already underway, but there was more to be done.
- Senior leaders have continued with their work to improve the school. They are determined to retain the school's unique character and ethos as they raise standards and improve the quality of education. They make no excuses about aspects of the school that are not yet good enough. They have a comprehensive understanding of the standards, including those which the school is not currently meeting.
- Leaders have sensibly chosen actions which are most likely to result in sustainable improvements, rather than taking a quick fix 'sticking-plaster' approach. They have identified suitable priorities for improvement and put appropriate procedures in place that help them to check whether things are getting better. Some of these changes have taken time to get in place, which means that the impact has been slow to see. Leaders' investments in staff training and support have been sensible ones.
- Trustees have also reviewed the effectiveness of their work. Some personnel are new in post, with deliberate recruitment choices helping to bring a suitably broad range of expertise to the trust board's work. Trustees now have clear arrangements in place for checking what leaders tell them about the school's strengths and improvement priorities. Collectively, they are well informed about the school's work. Currently, they are more focused on whether planned actions are achieved than they are on what difference these actions are making to pupils' experiences at the school.
- Despite leaders' convincing work, their actions have not currently led to all of part 1 of the standards being met. Consequently, the un-met standards in part 8 also remain un-met.

## **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. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. 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	10291322

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	Waldorf School
School status	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	412
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	51
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Michael Hall Trust Ltd
Chair	Tali Michaels
Principal	Sarah Stokes
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,030 to £15,825
Telephone number	01342 822 275
Website	<a href="http://www.michaelhall.co.uk/">www.michaelhall.co.uk/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:reception@michaelhall.co.uk">reception@michaelhall.co.uk</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	11 to 13 October 2022

## Information about this school

- Michael Hall is an independent school for pupils aged two to 19. It was the first Steiner Waldorf school to be established in the United Kingdom. It is owned and operated by Michael Hall Trust Ltd. The school is based in extensive grounds, of which it has exclusive use.
- The school received its last standard inspection in October 2022 and was judged as

requires improvement. Since that inspection, the DfE has granted the school permission to admit children from the age of two.

- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- The school has an exemption from the learning and development aspects of the early years foundation stage framework.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- The inspection was carried out without notice.
- Inspectors met with the principal and director of studies to discuss the work done to improve the school since the last inspection. They also spoke to a number of other senior and middle leaders and to a group of pupils. The lead inspector met with three representatives of the board of trustees, including the chair.
- Inspectors toured the site and visited lessons to see learning in action. They looked at examples of curriculum planning and of pupils' work.
- To consider the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, inspectors reviewed the single central record of recruitment checks and the school's safeguarding and child protection policy. They met with the designated safeguarding lead to review training and procedures and sampled records kept about safeguarding concerns.
- Inspectors reviewed various other relevant policies and documents available on the school's website and looked at the school's records of complaints received and actions taken.

## Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Julie Sackett

His Majesty's Inspector

## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **The school does not meet the following independent school standards**

*Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and remain un-met at 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; 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;

#### **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



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