

Inspection of Michael Hall School

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

Inspection dates: 24 to 26 September 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are at ease and content at Michael Hall School. The broad and rich curriculum is ambitious. It leads to pupils achieving highly in public examinations. Through the Steiner Waldorf ethos, pupils love the opportunities for imagination, creativity and exploration. Pupils' character is a strength, with sixth-form students acting as impressive role models.

There is a calm environment in lessons, where pupils are immersed in staff's storytelling and presentation of ideas. Pupils are respectful, work hard and eagerly contribute. In Kindergarten, children play happily together as staff skilfully nurture children's relationships and interactions with each other.

The body, soul and spirit underpin pupils' education and personal development. Pupils treat the school's natural environment with great care and adore being outside. Pupils do gardening, make soup from homegrown vegetables and produce biodynamic compost.

Festivals such as Michaelmas and a range of educational visits, including overseas, greatly enhance pupils' experiences. Pupils express themselves through the arts, for example, poetry, playing in an orchestra and acting on stage in theatre productions. The annual 'Olympic Games' involves pupils mixing with other Steiner Waldorf schools where they train, play and camp together. The school community is excited for its centenary year celebrations.

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

The school has shifted significantly forward in its educational ambition and provision for pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Trustees and school leaders have the right training to fully understand their roles. This has enabled them to develop high-quality provision. Using statutory guidance, trustees check the impact of strategic decisions on the quality of education. Together, they have established a cohesive leadership team which understands the strengths and keys areas of improvement for the school. Staff and parents praise the work of the school team and, as a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stages of their education.

Michael Hall School follows the Steiner Waldorf international curriculum, which is underpinned by a 'head, heart and hands' approach. The curriculum encompasses a holistic view of a child's educational journey. Teachers set artistic and physical activities along with academic learning in a range of different national curriculum subjects. From the early years, curriculum thinking is precise because staff know when, how and what children need to learn. Adults teach the curriculum well, with a focus on children's play and the use of real-life contexts. From the start, the youngest children demonstrate independence and confidence in interacting with the planned activities for them.

Across the lower and middle schools, the daily main lesson is the key vehicle for teaching the curriculum. This lesson combines different subject themes together so that pupils make secure connections across their learning. Typically, pupils have the same class teacher for up to eight years and so teachers really know pupils inside out. This helps to ensure that lessons are well matched to what pupils know and need to learn. Key concepts in different subjects gradually build so that pupils learn content in the most suitable order. The school has worked on strengthening curriculum planning in the final year of Kindergarten so that pupils are better prepared for moving into the lower school.

Communication and language are prioritised well from the start so that pupils have the right skills when formal learning in reading begins. When pupils are ready to learn to read, the school's phonics programme is carefully sequenced to support pupils' reading accuracy and fluency. Furthermore, the accompanying reading books suit the interests of pupils learning at an older age. For pupils who may struggle with some aspects of reading, the school provides effective additional support. By the end of the lower school, most pupils read, write and spell in line with national curriculum expectations.

As pupils mature into young adulthood, curriculum ambition continues. Pupils study content that makes them think deeply. In the upper school, GCSE and A-level outcomes demonstrate that pupils attain highly because of the curriculum experiences they have had. Nevertheless, the school is looking to broaden its vocational offer so that some pupils are put on an educational pathway that is better suited to their career aspirations.

The work to improve the provision for pupils with SEND has been rapid. The inclusion coordinator has trained staff to better understand the learning needs of pupils in their class. This has given staff greater confidence and knowledge in how to adapt learning tasks where appropriate. However, there is work to do on improving teachers' skills in checking pupils' understanding. In lessons, teachers are not always adept in spotting when pupils have gaps in their learning. This means that some pupils are not yet secure in what they need to know. Positively, teachers are starting to use regular checks to identify what pupils know and where they need to adjust their teaching.

The school recognises that pupils' attendance is not as high as it should be, including in the sixth form. The latest guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) is helping reshape the school's attendance strategy and educating parents about the importance of their children regularly being at school. Across the different school phases, pupils follow routines and aim to play their part in the Waldorf community. They welcome others and show a good understanding of protected characteristics. In the well-being curriculum, pupils explore healthy relationships and debate different viewpoints. Over time, pupils become mature and responsible young people. Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 continues to be met.

Pupils and sixth-form students are well informed about careers education and get the right guidance. This includes work experience and help in applying for higher

education. Following the previous standard inspection, the proprietor has acted on improving the careers programme and has identified where further enhancements are needed.

Subject leaders have a firm grasp of curriculum leadership and what pupils learn across the school. They are more accustomed to carrying out quality assurance activities. The inclusion coordinator actively supports staff in closely checking the achievement of pupils with SEND. Newly appointed staff undertake an accredited programme of Steiner Waldorf teacher training. Furthermore, the school supports class teachers to have secure subject knowledge to confidently teach from class 1 through to class 9.

The proprietor has clear processes to check that the school continues to meet the standards in full, for example safeguarding and welfare requirements of the early years foundation stage and the monitoring of equipment and facilities across the school's extensive premises. The school also has well-considered risk assessments for staff living onsite.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

Information for the school and proprietor

- The school's checks on learning are not always pinpointing the precise knowledge gaps which pupils might have. This can lead to some pupils not learning new knowledge securely enough. The school should continue to work on supporting teachers' assessment and adaptations of the taught curriculum to enable all pupils to achieve the best possible outcomes.
- Some pupils are not attending regularly enough. The school does not have a clear enough analysis of the patterns and trends in absence to tackle this robustly. This means some pupils miss out on educational and valuable social opportunities. The school should firmly establish its processes to ensure that pupils attend regularly and punctually.

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	10322061
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	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	432
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	59
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Michael Hall School Ltd
Chair	Natalie Michaels
Principal	Emmeline Hawker (Acting Principal)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,400 to £19,550
Telephone number	01342 822 275
Website	www.michaelhall.co.uk
Email address	contact@michaelhall.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 March 2024

Information about this school

- Michael Hall School was founded in 1925 and is the longest-running Steiner Waldorf school in England. It is based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, with a prescribed curriculum in place. The school is a member of Waldorf UK, the national representative body for Steiner Waldorf education in the UK.
- The Kindergarten at Michael Hall School is exempt from some of the learning and development aspects of the early years foundation stage statutory framework. The Kindergarten admits children aged two and above.
- The school's site spans 120 acres and offers living accommodation to some staff.
- The existing director of studies became acting principal in August 2024.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school is not currently using any alternative provision.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place in October 2022.

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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in 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 met with senior leaders and staff. The lead inspector met with three trustees, including the chair.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives into these subjects: reading, mathematics, science, art and design, and humanities. To do this, they met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum planning, had discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and experiences at school. They observed pupils' behaviour and attitudes through the school day.
- The views of pupils, staff and parents were gathered through discussions and Ofsted's online surveys.
- Inspectors had tours of the school site to gather evidence about compliance with the standards. Inspectors also reviewed a range of other documents and policies, including on the school's website. They scrutinised school records, including attendance and behaviour information.

Inspection team

James Broadbridge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Laura James

His Majesty's Inspector

Louise Walker

His Majesty's Inspector

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