



Office for Standards
in Education

Michael Hall School

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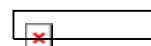
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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY



Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the

school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Michael Hall School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school with 590 pupils aged between three and 19, of whom 23 board with local families. There are also parent and child groups and playgroups for younger children. The termly intensive English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course lasts approximately three months and currently has eight pupils. Approximately 216 pupils are non-British nationals, although most have English as their first language or are bi-lingual. The school, which is a registered charity, is run by a Council of Management elected by the members of the Michael Hall Association and supported by the College of Teachers. The campus is also used for a variety of adult education and training courses at weekends and in school holidays.

Before pupils enter the school there is provision for parent and child groups with two playgroups for two to five year olds, both of which were inspected. The school has kindergarten classes for three to six year olds, followed by the lower school for pupils in classes 1 to 8 (Years 2 to 9 in National Curriculum terminology). In the lower school, classes 6, 7 and 8 are increasingly considered as a middle school group. The upper school includes classes 9 to 12 (Years 10 to 13) and the College Year follows to enable students to complete General Certificate of Education (GCE) A level courses as both these and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations are generally taken a year later than in the maintained sector.

The school is housed in an eighteenth century manor house surrounded by extensive, well laid out lawns and over 50 acres of woodland. There are purpose-built blocks for primary and secondary teaching as well as some temporary accommodation. The gym and theatre annex nearing completion is well designed according to Steiner principles and it has enabled a former gymnasium to be converted into a library with good study facilities. There is a 500 seat theatre and an outdoor theatre used for summer productions as well as a multi-user games area which serves tennis, netball and basketball. The kindergarten classes occupy a separate building with a large secure outdoor area.

Michael Hall School was founded in 1925 as the first Steiner Waldorf School in the English speaking world. It moved to its present site in 1945. As a prominent member of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, it follows the curriculum as developed by the Fellowship using principles first set out by Rudolf Steiner in 1919. The school handbook notes that:

"The school curriculum corresponds to the inner development of the child as he or she journeys from the imaginative world of early childhood to the adult world of clear intellectual thought."

"Children are taught in chronological age groups of mixed ability (and thereby) Steiner Waldorf education achieves one of its major aims - to cultivate children's social abilities."

"The approach to the education is never teaching from a fixed syllabus or established tradition, but needs to be created anew in every school and in every teacher..... Children need to fulfil their childhood during each phase (of education) without being hurried into the intellectual, materialistic world conception of our times."

Summary of main findings

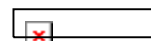
Michael Hall is a good school with many strengths, although there are some areas which require further development. The school is a caring community which successfully promotes pupils' spiritual, moral and social development by respecting children as individuals. It seeks to apply the

Steiner Waldorf Curriculum and successfully achieves this in many respects. The curriculum is broad, especially in the creative, expressive and applied arts and crafts, where high standards are achieved. However, there are a number of inconsistencies in how the curriculum is taught both between parallel classes in the same year and between different year groups. In recent years the school has sought to develop its approaches to teaching and learning and this has been achieved effectively.

What the school does well:

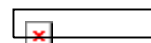
- it provides a generally good quality of teaching and there is some excellent teaching in creative, expressive and applied arts and crafts, which leads to high standards of achievement in these areas;
- music is a strength of the school, forming a part of the fabric of the curriculum in many other subject areas where musical performance, both as singing and instrumental work, adds a significant additional dimension to children's learning;
- the teaching of French and German to all children in classes 1 to 8 is mainly by native speakers of these languages and is enthusiastic and lively with a wide variety of well-paced activities, which are greatly enjoyed by the pupils and which lead to high standards of achievement;
- the teaching of English is effective in the upper school, and the introduction of specialist English teaching to the oldest classes in the lower school is a useful development which is raising pupils' achievements;
- pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted successfully and is a strength of the school. Pupils are encouraged to become responsible, thoughtful and considerate of others. They work well in groups and are able to be critical of their own achievements; and
- the provision for boarding is well run and organised. The families who have boarding pupils staying with them are well briefed and trained and the system is monitored and supported effectively.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:



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- it needs to complete a risk assessment under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 for all premises occupied by the school. At present the assessment covers two major buildings but the current review of other buildings should now be completed.

Next steps



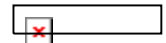
Whilst not specifically required by the regulations to address them, in its drive for further development the school may wish to consider the following matters, some of which are already included in its future planning:

- ways of ensuring that all lesson planning, teaching methods, learning activities and

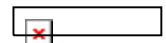
- use of class time reflect the current best practice in the school, providing consistency in teachers' expectations of pupils' attention;
- use of the pupils' individual education plans (IEPs) to support tasks more closely matched to pupils' individual capabilities, which are a feature of the very best lessons;
 - the provision of additional support in class for pupils, especially those who have recently joined the school, to encourage them to develop more appropriate behaviour and to enhance their basic skills;
 - the improvement of timetabling, including an audit of time allocated for each subject, especially in the youngest classes in the lower school;
 - a review of the EFL course to ensure that the current timetable accurately reflects the taught programme and results in a broader and more balanced overall curriculum; and
 - in the lower school, ensure that there is consistency in the planning of work for parallel classes in each year group.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school



The quality of the curriculum



The school's curriculum is reasonably broad and balanced and covers a wide range of subjects and themes drawn from the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum. Personal, social, moral and spiritual education is at the core of the school's curriculum objectives and the school ensures that it is promoted throughout all subjects and age groups.

The main curriculum document has been developed by the Pedagogic Section for the School for Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland and the Steiner Schools Fellowship. Lesson planning within the school is mainly by individual teachers, although the English Department has recently begun to hold weekly meetings which plan the work in detail to ensure consistency in teaching. This is a useful practice which could be more widely developed. At present, planning in other subjects tends to lack consistency between classes and year groups, particularly in the lower school, where class teachers are responsible for teaching most subjects. As teachers take the same class for the eight years of the lower school, variations in curriculum become significant over time. However, in several year groups staff have begun to share their planning between the two parallel classes.

In the playgroups and kindergarten classes, planning is organised using the Early Learning Goals while assessment is provided by the Foundation Stage Profile. The Profile has been revised to accommodate the Steiner Waldorf approach and is a useful document which is shared with the parents. The common planning system supports continuity, as do the regular discussions between staff. Their shared perceptions enable a clear approach to be taken towards noting pupils' development. Staff in the kindergarten discuss these and other issues affecting pupils with their parents when they make regular visits to the pupils' homes. The playgroups and kindergarten provide a secure foundation for subsequent work throughout the school, and their daily and weekly

routines are carefully planned to promote the pupils' security and confidence as well as their personal development.

As in the playgroups and kindergarten, there is a clear routine to the curriculum in the older classes. The main lesson at the start of the day focuses on a particular theme defined by the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum which is generally studied for about three or four weeks for about two hours each morning. Themes cover a range of subjects, including history, science, mathematics, English, art, and the world of work. Eurythmy, an art of movement, is taught throughout the lower and upper schools, as are English, mathematics, religious studies, games, music and a range of handwork, craft and related subjects. Overall, this provides a broad curriculum with an emphasis on a very wide variety of creative, expressive and applied arts and crafts. English pervades the curriculum, especially in the lower school. Most main lessons contain components of English and there are sessions of English in every class on a daily basis. Music, whilst also being taught separately, plays a major part in the overall curriculum, with singing being a regular feature of the daily routine in the playgroups, kindergarten and lower school. Specialist instrumental tuition is provided by 20 peripatetic teachers, and in the main lesson all lower school pupils learn to play the recorder.

In the lower school, time allocations for subject areas are hard to establish accurately due to the extremely high proportion of the timetable spent on main lesson themes. This is often used for a variety of purposes not always defined in writing and can include as much as over two thirds of the pupil's time in class. In the older lower school classes, which the school has begun to term the 'middle school' (classes 6, 7 and 8, equivalent to Years 7, 8 and 9), there is some specialist teaching in subjects such as metalwork, bookbinding, handwork and gardening. This has recently been extended to include English and has resulted in a significant improvement in pupils' standards of achievement. In English and mathematics, there are three main lessons in each class during the year, covering a variety of themes and topics, as specified in the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum. This is supplemented by extra work in these subjects by the class teacher up to Year 9, but the amount of time spent is at the discretion of the teacher and thus varies. French and German are taught throughout the lower school by native speakers. A basic vocabulary is developed, extended and applied through responses to questions and engagement in simple dialogue. The teaching of science by non-specialists up to Year 9 covers a range of ideas but occasionally this leads to imprecise use of terminology, which limits the progress made by pupils. Science lessons are often taught in classrooms, restricting opportunities for experimental and investigative work.

The curriculum in the upper school is reasonably broad and balanced. The time allocation for mathematics and science is below the average and limits the scope of pupils' work. All pupils study English, double science, mathematics, games, eurythmy and religious studies. Most learn a modern language and some take two. There is a choice of options, including information and communication technology, art and history, so that pupils are entered for up to eight or nine GCSE subjects. The school has recently been accredited by the Open College Network (OCN) which enables pupils to study for a number of credits which may equate to GCSEs or A levels. Until recently the courses included physical education, Spirit of the Times, woodwork and metalwork, and these have now been extended to include humanities elements. There are detailed curriculum plans for English, mathematics and science, following the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum. In the GCSE and A level classes, the examination syllabuses are used to plan the work. To provide as wide a range of options and combinations as possible, some subjects are taught after school hours.

English in the upper school is taught by subject specialists and this approach is now used in the older classes in the lower school. It enables focused teaching to develop pupils' learning effectively.

Some mathematical ideas are taught through topics such as the Platonic solids, projective geometry, or the Golden ratio, within the main lesson. The links made with other subject areas are a distinctive feature of this approach, stressing the cross-curricular nature of mathematical ideas, such as curve stitching, or practical applications, such as planning a playground. Other ideas are taught within supplementary lessons, which are sometimes linked to the main lesson. Pupils are grouped by attainment in mathematics from Year 10, which helps teachers to pitch work at a generally appropriate level but with limited differentiation. Pupils work collaboratively on the tasks set either in pairs or small groups.

In the College Year (Year 14), students complete their A level and other examination courses whilst being able to join school activities, such as sports and drama, if they wish. There is also the opportunity for pupils to apply for degree courses at the University of Surrey (Roehampton) without Advanced Supplementary (AS) levels if they have completed a full non-examination programme accredited by the Steiner Waldorf School Fellowship in classes 11 and 12.

The present provision on the short EFL course is of good quality; however the current timetable does not accurately reflect the taught programme. This should be reviewed, so that a broader overall curriculum is delivered and pupils' other subject skills and knowledge are also sustained, especially when the pupils are of compulsory school age.

The quality of teaching and assessment

In over one third of the 65 lessons observed during the inspection, the teaching was judged to be at least good, with no significant weaknesses, whilst in one eighth the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. In the remainder the strengths outweighed the weaknesses.

The most effective teaching occurs when the teachers apply a clear and consistent approach to possible distractions, ensuring that pupils maintain close attention to the task. Teaching in the playgroups and kindergarten is well planned and follows clear routines for the day and week. At the start of the day children are welcomed by staff who have resources ready for their use. Stories are told effectively. However, in some lessons in both the lower and upper schools a small minority of pupils cause distractions, especially where teachers do not sufficiently insist that pupils pay attention. In such cases, particularly where pupils have recently joined the lower school and are not fully aware of its routines and practices, some additional support from a second adult in the class even for a short time, might help to ease such difficulties and enable other pupils to maintain their concentration.

English is taught well throughout the school. Pupils enjoy English lessons and appreciate opportunities to explore language and literature. They react well when teaching provides opportunities to work collaboratively and when encouraged to develop their speaking and listening skills. They produce high quality project work in Expressive English and Literature in the upper school. The three month EFL course is effectively taught and is well tailored to the needs of individual students to whom appropriate end of course certification is offered.

In the lower school, some teaching was less effective due to teachers' more limited subject knowledge, especially in some mathematics and science lessons. In the upper school, science teaching is sound and enables most pupils to make satisfactory progress.

The teaching of German is of good quality throughout the School. Teachers know their pupils well, often having taught them for several years. German language teaching benefits from native speakers providing very precise models for the spoken language. German in the lower school is characterised by a lively range of songs, rhymes, games and activities which succeed in engaging pupils' attention, sustaining their concentration and developing their competence. Teaching in the upper school continues the emphasis on speaking and listening while also developing pupils' ability to read and write the language. Older pupils listen and respond to complex questions and apply grammatical rules. Whilst only a limited amount of French teaching was observed, this also consistently used opportunities to help pupils to make connections and begin to see how the language works. The teaching of French makes effective use of the target language, with action and mime to elicit effort and involvement from the pupils, who make good progress.

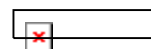
There is a comprehensive screening process for identifying pupils who may have special educational needs. The learning support department of three teachers provides lessons for individual pupils based on their specific needs. These sessions are of good quality and reflect the targets in the pupils' IEPs. IEPs are a relatively new introduction. Their regular reviews involve discussions between support teachers and class teachers. However, the latter rarely take account

of the pupils' specific targets when planning whole class lessons. The content of these lessons is often the same for all pupils and tasks are rarely adapted to reflect the wide range of academic ability in the class. Overall, therefore, apart from the annual reports and the Foundation Stage Profile, most of the regular assessments focus on the pupils' personal and social development, especially in the kindergarten and lower school. This is in accordance with the school's philosophy, but monitoring of pupils' progress or diagnosis of their possible difficulties in acquiring basic subject skills, is less evident at present.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils



Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a significant strength of the school. Questions of human values are central to the Steiner Waldorf philosophy of education, which is non-denominational and broadly Christian. This philosophy encompasses: social harmony and team work; a sense of wonder and reverence for the natural world; opportunities to form judgements and to resolve social difficulties; and the nourishment of the spirit through self-expression. These elements of pupils' personal development are implicit within the ethos that permeates the life of the school and are strengthened through a wide range of curricular opportunities.

Regular participation in drama productions and performances contribute much to pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence. Opportunities for expressing inner feelings are fundamental to the Steiner philosophy. The frequent recitation of verses at various times during the day is an outward expression of the shared beliefs of the community. The practice of teachers taking the same class from Years 2 to 9 fosters an especially close-knit relationship between pupils and staff. This is more successful in some classes than in others and can be affected by the turnover of pupils and teachers. Pupils who join classes after Year 1 are generally absorbed well into the community ethos but a few have difficulty settling to the different regime and would benefit from additional support. Where the system is successful, teachers and pupils spontaneously enjoy events such as a pupil's birthday or join in activities with equal participation, whether in the playgroups or in German lessons.

In the playgroups, kindergarten and lower school, adults provide a strong role model of positive behaviour for pupils to follow. Pupils in the lower school behave well on the playground, enjoying games and socialising in a friendly manner. During the inspection there was no evidence of disagreements or aggressive behaviour, although older pupils were boisterous during a wet break time. Pupils of all ages are polite and friendly to visitors and show them small courtesies such as holding open a door. The majority of pupils respond positively in lessons, showing a satisfactory level of attention and concentration. At best, pupils are well behaved and persevere with their work. The misbehaviour of a small number of individuals in some classes in the lower school adversely affects the ethos of the classroom at times and the quality of learning. A small minority test the boundaries set by their teachers.

Parents are rightly confident, as are pupils themselves, that the school encourages them to become mature and to accept increased responsibility for themselves and for others as they get older. They willingly accept responsibilities, such as representing their peers on the Student Council, and older pupils readily volunteer to support younger pupils in a drama production or in the role of 'godparent'. The oldest pupils value the good level of pastoral support they receive from staff and from their

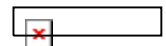
peers. Pupils are encouraged to work in teams on specific projects for the good of the community. For example, Year 10 pupils decorated the interior of the eurythmy studio. In lessons, the oldest pupils move easily into collaborative work, often helping one another. Through social history, current affairs and the OCN programme: 'Spirit of the Times', pupils gain a wider understanding of public institutions and services in England. This is supported by visits to places of interest, such as that by the EFL group to see the opening of parliament.

The nature of the school's international population brings pupils into contact with other cultures constantly. This is strengthened by opportunities to study French and German from Year 2 and Spanish in the upper school. The school's national and international links with other Steiner schools enable pupils to experience cultural exchanges to other countries. The pupils' European cultural roots figure prominently in the drama, literature and mythology that are strong features of the curriculum. This is extended in later years with the study of world mythology. Music makes a valuable contribution to pupils' cultural development in the wide variety of styles studied.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils



The school has appropriate policies on pupils' welfare, health and safety which meet the requirements for registration. They are generally implemented effectively, and are supported by the work of the pastoral care team, two of whom are trained counsellors. They work closely with other local support workers to provide good advice for the pupils as needed. The good quality welfare and counselling systems support the school's ethos effectively and are implicit in the school's work with pupils.

The boarding provision is a strength of the school. Following the closure of the school boarding house some years ago, the current boarders are placed with local families, most of whom have children attending the school. Child protection and Criminal Records Bureau procedures are applied and the pastoral care team provide good support and training. There is a good complaints document outlining procedures in case of difficulty. At present over half of the 15 full time boarders are attending the EFL course; the remainder of the boarders are weekly.

The First Aid policy is satisfactory: the care and support provided by the staff in the First Aid room is of high quality and is backed up by very good recording systems.

Risk assessments under the relevant fire regulations have been made for some buildings on the site, but not for the majority.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

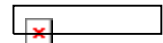
No

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *complete the current overall risk assessment and take appropriate action in relation to fire safety (paragraph 3.5).*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff



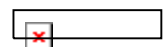
The school's management structure reflects its collegiate approach. The members of the Michael Hall Association are drawn from parents, past pupils, current older pupils, staff and friends of the school. They elect the Council of Management whose members are the directors of the managing company, Michael Hall School Limited. This Council has 12 elected members (four teachers, four parents and four other people) and four-ex officio members who are staff from the school. The Council deals with school administration and finance. The staff form the College of Teachers which is responsible collectively for the education provided at the school. These arrangements are published for parents and other interested people.

The school makes appropriate checks on staff prior to their appointment and, where relevant, checks are made on staff who care for, train or otherwise come into contact with pupils who board under the school's arrangements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation



Accommodation is generally good and in certain areas is very good. There is specialist accommodation for a wide range of subjects. Classrooms are well maintained, have adequate space and desks and chairs are in good condition. Provision for pupils in the playgroups and kindergarten meets the legal requirements.

The indoor working environments are clean and effective throughout the school; there is very good specialist provision for drama and performance. The old gym has been remodelled to form a library and learning centre and its replacement is about to open as a very well equipped large modern sports hall with good changing facilities. It is a significant addition to the school's facilities, along with space for theatre costume making, storage and design. The medical centre is well appointed and welcoming.

The school's buildings are spread across a large site. Outside play areas are adequate and accessible. Grounds and gardens are well maintained but some pathways require resurfacing and

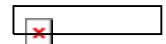
in particular the roadways need more effective lighting. Some vehicles ignore the speed restrictions in the drive, creating safety hazards. Risk assessment has addressed access issues but needs to be revisited to ensure that warning signs are placed at the most appropriate points, including warning of pedestrian crossings.

Accommodation for boarders is off-site and located with host families.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners



The school's information for parents is a very comprehensive 100 page handbook. However, it does not always fully reflect recently updated policies, such as that on complaints procedures. The school intends to address this shortly. Its coverage of most aspects of the school is good, but its considerable detail leads to parents being uncertain about aspects of its content. It includes contact details for staff, and seeks to explain the school management structures as well as policies on admissions, discipline and exclusions. The curriculum is explained in some detail, forming one third of the Parents' Handbook. Additional documents provide outline information on the early years, lower school and upper school programmes and information on academic performance in external examinations (GCSE, A levels and modules and the OCN) are provided for all parents and pupils in the weekly 'Friday Flyer' at appropriate intervals.

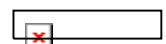
Annual written reports to parents are comprehensive, but their layout should be made consistent for all subjects reported on. Parents of pupils receiving support for their special educational needs are provided with a helpful termly report.

A 'Community Perception Survey' conducted in 2002 indicated that parents were not clear about the work of the 'Mandates' whereby staff have responsibility for administering and developing aspects of the school's work. Although these are explained in the Parents' Handbook, as with the complaints procedure, further steps should be taken to ensure that such important aspects of the school's management are more clearly understood.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints



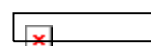
The complaints procedure has been revised in line with the legal requirements that have recently

been introduced and is fully compliant with these. However, some parents expressed their concerns that they were not aware of the procedure. The 'Mediation' section of the Parents' Handbook needs to reflect the complaints procedure more fully and needs to be placed elsewhere in that Handbook rather than in the part addressing boarding issues.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS



Name of school:	Michael Hall School
Type of school:	Day and Boarding
DfES Ref. No.	845/6037
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	3-19
Number on roll:	590
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Fees:	Day: from £3225 to £6810 per year. Residential: weekly from £1225 to 1685 per term, depending on the time of year. Full boarding from £1455 to 2000 per term, depending on the time of year
Address of school:	Kidbrooke Park, Forest Row, East Sussex, RH18 5JA
Email address:	info@michaelhall.co.uk
Telephone number:	01342 822275
Fax number:	01342 826593
Education Administrator:	Mr Ewout Van Manen
Proprietor:	Michael Hall School Limited
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Martin Bradley HMI
Dates of Inspection:	24 - 28 November 2003

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