

Michael Hall School

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

Inspection date

24 November 2021

Overall outcome

The school meets all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 2(1)–2(1)(a), 2(2), 2(2)(h), 3–3(a), 3(c)–3(e), 3(g)

- At the time of the previous standard inspection, in March 2019, there were weaknesses in the school's curriculum and teaching. The November 2019 progress monitoring inspection found that some of the previously unmet standards were then met. However, weaknesses remained in aspects of teaching and the implementation of the planned curriculum.
- The approach to improving the quality of teaching is now much more systematic. Leaders are focusing on the most important areas, including teachers' subject knowledge and classroom practice.
- Leaders have rightly prioritised training for themselves and teachers. They have drawn on strengthened links with the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship. Leaders at different levels also access knowledge and expertise from those in mainstream education in order to gain and learn from different perspectives and approaches.
- Key to the work to improve teaching has been the creation of a more 'open' and trusting culture in the school, supporting the drive for a more consistent approach. In addition to training, the school's strategy centres around peer observation in order to support improvement. Teachers are positive about the difference this is making to their teaching. Written records show that teachers do not shy away from a 'critical friend' role, suggesting how colleagues might improve their practice. Leaders also attach much importance to the mentoring of new teachers.
- Leaders have introduced some 'non-negotiables' that underpin the school's view of effective teaching, and they aim to ensure that the independent school standards about teaching are met.
- Part of the more open culture in the school is the creation of new subject leader roles. The remit of the new subject lead position focuses on the quality of education right across the school, breaking down previous artificial barriers between classes and teachers. Subject leaders have responsibility and oversight for their subjects across all

areas, including class and specialist teaching, the main lesson and subject-specific lessons. Leadership of English and mathematics has been prioritised and is more advanced than for other subjects.

- Brief visits to lessons made during the inspection indicated that leaders' asserted strategies are making a difference. Discussions with teachers and practice observed from the small sample provided evidence that the school has made progress addressing the previously unmet standards. For example, the subject knowledge of those teaching older pupils has been secured. Teachers take more account of pupils' previous learning and different abilities when planning lessons and activities.
- The requirements that were previously unmet in this part are now met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7–7(b), 32(1), 32(1)(c)

- The previous progress monitoring inspection, conducted in March 2021, identified weaknesses in safeguarding practice. These related to procedures for recording concerns, making timely referrals to local safeguarding partners and leaders' oversight of safeguarding arrangements.
- Leaders have responded decisively to the previous inspection findings about safeguarding. Shocked by previously identified weaknesses, current leaders have sought to review all safeguarding arrangements. They have updated, amended and tightened policies and procedures where necessary. Leaders have engaged positively and extensively with the local authority in this respect.
- Making the acting principal the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) for this interim period reflects the rightful importance attached to this area. A sensible, more sustainable solution has been found with the recent appointment of a qualified and experienced dedicated DSL to the senior leadership team.
- Safeguarding training has been strengthened for trustees, leaders and staff. Some of this training is assessed to ensure that staff have understood important messages. Leaders also monitor and review safeguarding processes to check that staff follow the school's protocols and use the associated systems correctly.
- Leaders can confidently explain to whom different concerns should be referred beyond the school. Records show that these processes are followed. Safeguarding records also show that staff are alert to low-level concerns. They document and respond to these carefully. There are systems in place for leaders to regularly review this information, putting different 'puzzle pieces' together to see if it is part of a wider picture that gives greater cause for concern.
- A suitable safeguarding policy is published on the school's website. The policy has been extensively reviewed and updated since the previous inspection. It takes account of relevant guidance and references local arrangements.
- The requirements that were previously unmet in this part, and the associated requirements in part 6, are now met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- The March 2019 standard inspection, and subsequent additional inspections, found repeatedly unmet standards through a period of significant instability at school leader and trustee levels.
- There is now a calmness, clarity and consistency of leadership that has not previously been evident. The acting principal provides strong leadership. The atmosphere at the time of this inspection was one of cohesion and unity.
- A clear leadership structure has been established and there are signs it is becoming more stable. Some senior leaders are now well established in their roles and can no longer be considered new to their posts. Trustees decided to appoint one of the previous assistant principals as acting principal for a substantial period as a positive step aimed at bringing stability. Current evidence indicates that this aim has been achieved.
- The enthusiasm of the leaders and teachers the inspector spoke to about the school's direction and trajectory was undeniable.
- There is an increasingly stable picture of governance. Trustees have a firmer understanding of where the school is at and where it is heading. A skills audit has led to some targeted ongoing recruitment of new trustees who have helpful knowledge or experience but are independent from the school. Trustees have commissioned a professional clerk to support their work from January.
- There is a consistency of message between trustees and school leaders and a strong desire to improve. At all levels, leaders are striving to finely balance the Steiner Waldorf traditions with the diversity of expertise and best practice in the modern education world.
- Systems for checking that independent school standards are continually met remain a work in progress. Trustees and leaders are rightly ensuring that oversight of these important standards is carried out at the right levels by the most relevant people. Trustees have commissioned external support from a school improvement partner for some of this work. However, leaders are understandably aiming to achieve a sustainable approach, and it is too soon for leaders to have completed a full cycle.
- The requirements that were previously unmet in this part are now met.

Statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage

- The safeguarding failings found at the previous progress monitoring inspection led directly to lapses in statutory welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The school's work to strengthen safeguarding arrangements for the whole school means that these aspects of the welfare requirements are also now met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets 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.

The school now meets 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.
- 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; and
 - 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.

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.

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
 - 33(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Early years foundation stage

The safeguarding and welfare requirements

Child protection

3.4. Providers must be alert to any issues of concern in the child's life at home or elsewhere. Providers must have and implement a policy, and procedures, to safeguard children. These should be in line with the guidance and procedures of the relevant local safeguarding partners (LSP). The safeguarding policy and procedures must include an explanation of the action to be taken when there are safeguarding concerns about a child and in the event of an allegation being made against a member of staff, and cover the use of mobile phones and cameras in the setting. To safeguard children and practitioners online, providers will find it helpful to refer to 'Safeguarding children and protecting professionals in early years settings: online safety considerations'.

3.7. Providers must have regard to the government's statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' and to the 'Prevent duty guidance for England and Wales'. All schools are required to have regard to the government's 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' statutory guidance, and other childcare providers may also find it helpful to refer to this guidance. If providers have concerns about children's safety or welfare, they must notify agencies with statutory responsibilities without delay. This means the local children's social care services and, in emergencies, the police.

School details

Unique reference number	114625
DfE registration number	845/6037
Inspection number	10214033

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 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	393
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	37
Number of part-time pupils	55
Proprietor	Council of Trustees of the Michael Hall School
Chair	William Forward
Principal	Emmeline Hawker (Acting Principal)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,124 to £13,311
Telephone number	01342 822 275
Website	www.michaelhall.co.uk
Email address	contact@michaelhall.co.uk
Dates of previous standard inspection	26 to 28 March 2019

Information about this school

- The school's last standard inspection took place in March 2019. Since then, the school has received two progress monitoring inspections, in November 2019 and March 2021. In addition, an emergency inspection took place in December 2020 because of concerns raised about the school.
- The school has been led by an acting principal since March 2021.

- 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 its ranks.
- This 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 use alternative providers.
- The school no longer has any boarding provision.

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 standard inspection, in March 2019.
- This was the third progress monitoring inspection following those previously conducted in November 2019 and March 2021, when the school was judged to still not comply with the independent school standards.
- The Department for Education did not require the school to prepare an action plan following the March 2021 inspection.
- The inspection was conducted without notice.
- The inspector spoke with the acting principal, other leaders, staff, pupils and trustees. He visited lessons and scrutinised a range of the school's records and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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