

Michael Hall School

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

Inspection date

18 March 2021

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

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

- At the last standard inspection in March 2019 and the subsequent first monitoring inspection in November 2019, aspects of Part 1 were found not to be met. These standards were part of the Department for Education's (DfE) commission for this monitoring inspection.
- Because of exceptional circumstances encountered during the on-site visit, including the need for sensible adaptations to inspection practice linked to the current COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, it was not possible to make an accurate or fair judgement about the progress made towards meeting any of the unmet standards in Part 1.
- Insufficient evidence was collected to make a secure judgement as to whether these standards remain unmet or are now met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7 – 7(b), 32(1) and 32(1)(c)

- Arrangements to protect the welfare, health and safety of pupils are not strong enough in this school. Procedures to record concerns and make timely referrals to either the designated officer, or to the local authority safeguarding team through the single point of advice, are not good enough.
- Records of safeguarding concerns are not complete because key staff do not update the school's system to record safeguarding concerns in a timely manner.
- Senior leaders' oversight of safeguarding is not rigorous enough. This includes those in positions of governance, who have not acted to ensure that the welfare, health and safety of staff and pupils are given the highest priority. In particular, leaders have not ensured that appropriate action has been taken in a timely manner to safeguard and promote children's welfare.

- The school's safeguarding policy is published on the school's website. At the time of the inspection, it did not fully reflect recent changes in members of the council of trustees in the main contact details.
- Standards 7 – 7(b) are now unmet. Standards 32(1) and 32(1)(c) remain met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1) – 34(1)(c)

- Leaders have not ensured that all the independent school standards are met. In particular, arrangements to protect the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff are not good enough. This is true across all phases of the school, including Kindergarten.
- Leadership and management of the school have been unstable in the recent past. At the time of this inspection, the substantive principal of the school was absent, having been suspended by the council of trustees in February 2021. Additionally, one of the school's assistant principals resigned with immediate effect in the week prior to this inspection.
- The recent suspension of the substantive principal coincided with the resignation of the chair of trustees. The new chair of trustees is the fourth since the school's last standard inspection in March 2019, when the school's overall effectiveness was judged to be inadequate with unmet independent school standards.
- Leaders have not acted as a collegiate team in recent times. Formal grievances have been lodged by different members of the school's leadership team. Allegations of bullying behaviour, or collusion between members of the council and members of the school's leadership team, are not rare. Whatever the rights or wrongs of the claims and counterclaims, it is clear that the school has not been led well in recent times.
- Those in positions of governance, as well as leaders currently at the school, have not acted quickly enough to ensure that arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Their work with outside agencies is not strong. The designated officer from East Sussex local authority has well-founded concerns about leaders' knowledge and ability to report safeguarding matters in a timely manner. Furthermore, local authority officers are concerned that leaders are not fully aware or mindful of the local arrangements to report safeguarding concerns.
- Part 1 (Quality of education provided) was not a focus for the on-site phase of this inspection. However, it is clear that leaders have been working to address the qualitative weaknesses found in Part 1 at the last standard inspection. This has included work in collaboration with the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship.
- Leaders have also been working to restructure the school's timetable and other aspects of the way the curriculum is delivered. This work is currently behind schedule, but leaders and the chair and vice chair of the council of trustees are optimistic that this process will be complete for the start of the new academic year 2021/22.
- Standards 34(1) – 34(1)(b) remain unmet. Standard 34(1)(c) is now unmet.

Statutory requirements of the early years foundation stage

- Arrangements to meet the welfare and safeguarding requirements of the early years foundation stage are not strong enough. The same concerns identified in Part 3 and in Part 8 apply equally to children in the Kindergarten phase of the school. This means that

paragraphs 3.4 and 3.7 of the statutory safeguarding and welfare requirements of the early years foundation stage are not 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, as set out in the annex of this report. 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	10182232

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 boarding 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	395
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	40
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Council of Trustees of the Michael Hall School
Chair	William Forward
Principal	Paul Farr
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,000 to £13,500
Telephone number	01342 822 275
Website	http://www.michaelhall.co.uk/
Email address	contact@michaelhall.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	26 to 28 March 2019

Information about this school

- The school's last standard inspection took place in March 2019 when the overall effectiveness was judged to be inadequate and some independent school standards were found to be unmet. A monitoring inspection took place in November 2019. An emergency inspection took place in December 2020 because of concerns raised about the school.

- A 'director of learning' was appointed after the last standard inspection. The director of learning was subsequently appointed 'principal', in overall charge of the school.
- At the time of this inspection, the school was being led by the acting principal because the substantive principal was not present, having been suspended in February 2021.
- An assistant principal with responsibility for upper school resigned with immediate effect the week before this inspection.
- Since the last emergency inspection, a new chair of the council of trustees has been appointed due to the resignation of the previous chair. The new chair took up this position in February 2021.
- The chair of the council of trustees has changed three times since the last standard inspection.
- 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.
- 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.

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.
- This inspection was commissioned by the DfE during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2021.
- Because of exceptional circumstances during this inspection, the inspector did not fully consider the unmet standards in Part 1 of the independent school standards outlined in the annex to this report.
- This was the second monitoring inspection since the school's last standard inspection in March 2019.
- The school was required to prepare an action plan following the last standard inspection. This was assessed as fit for purpose in July 2019.
- The inspector met with the acting principal and other members of the school's wider leadership team, including the designated safeguarding lead. He also met with the chair and vice chair of the council of trustees. The lead inspector was also in contact with East Sussex County Council's designated officer during the inspection.
- The inspector checked a range of policies and documents. He also reviewed records regarding the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff, as well as records of the work of the council of trustees.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her 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 not 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 subparagraph (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;
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 - 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 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.

Standards that were met at the previous inspection, but are now judged to not be met at this inspection

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)(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 Children Board (LSCB). 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.

3.7. Providers must have regard to the government's statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 and to the 'Prevent duty guidance for England and Wales 2015. 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.

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